

1994

# Spectrum, 1994

Spectrum Contributors  
*Northwestern College, Iowa*

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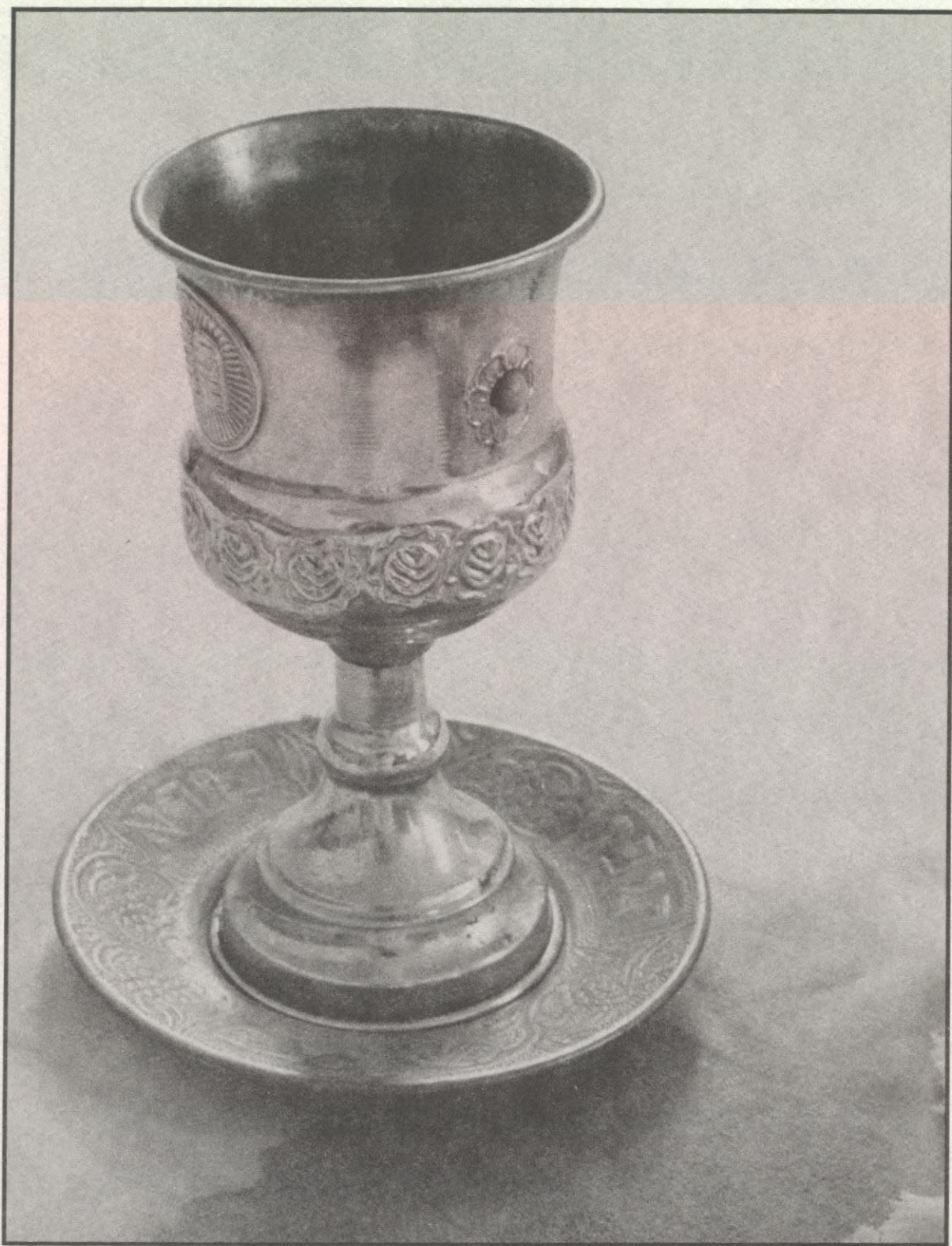


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# NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE



# SPECTRUM

1994



## JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Jim Heynen, a Sioux County native whose published works include *Maedra Poems*, *The Man Who Kept Cigars in His Cap*, and *A Suitable Church*, evaluated those submissions selected for publication by our staff readers. He writes: "In making a final decision, I found that it really came down to choosing between apples and oranges, especially in the poetry submissions."

First prize in poetry went to Angie Kenobbie for "The Bib-Overalls." "I felt it was the most successful poem of the lot. It saves itself from the blatantly sentimental with a voice that is, finally, convincing; and this poem . . . has . . . the most memorable single image—that of the chemical burn in the overalls corresponding to the grandfather's cancer."

Heynen gave honorable mention to Kellie Gregg for two poems, "Clown's Face," with its "simplicity and balanced form," and "At the Concert Hall," which he said "has a lively movement that I liked." Partly because it "reminds us how effective simple repetition can be to enforce the power of remembered events," "Teen Missions International in Papua New Guinea," earned an honorable mention for Krista Willis. He awarded Kelly Mowrer an honorable mention for "Lamentation," remarking, "the garden image and the rhythm of this poem I found very attractive."

First prize in fiction was awarded to Joy Sterner for "Carrying On." Heynen describes it as "a lovely story, exact in its physical details and subtle in its deep emotive undertow."

Honorable mention was given to several authors, including Susan Van Rees for "Anna and Me." Heynen calls this work "graceful and powerful." He adds, "In the better stories, like this one, I saw a kind of patient stealth in the writer's method, stories that accomplish an emotional depth through gradual accumulation of information."

Kevin Bullis' "Mademoiselle" and "The Other Bird" were noted for their effective prose poem qualities, and, finally, Heynen appreciated another piece by Kelly Mowrer, "Her Waking," which he called "ambitious."

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# Carrying On

Joy Sterner, first place fiction

I plant these flowers with a vengeance today, a sort of steely determination blocking out the groanings my body is making, leaned over the black earth. The noises of the neighborhood—shrieking children on bicycles racing past each other on the sidewalk, tired dogs panting loudly in the mid-afternoon sun, the lawnmower screaming next door—fades into the creaking my knees make as they shift into a more tolerable position, leaving moon-shaped indents in the soil behind me.

I know what my husband thought of my insistence on planting today; of the trip to the nursery I made this morning, to select a flat of small, purpley-violet flowers with tiny yellow tongues, and a new five-pound bag of fertilizer to rest against the side wall of the garage. But perhaps it is more important that I recall what he does not know, as the puzzled look that covers his face now reminds me.

It is my fault, I know, that he understands nothing of the ritual my father and I would repeat each year, before the dry weeks of July began. Each summer we would trek to the nursery and repeat the custom. We would separate upon entering the automatic sliding doors, and wander alone through aisles of gardenias and cacti, the drone of florescent tubes slowly filling our ears. I would know to find him, some thirty minutes later, in the out-of-doors section, right hand moving slowly over his thickly mustached mouth, pensively deliberating over flats of small, purple flowers. I would walk to his side, point out a few of the hardier looking plants, and after some thought we'd choose six or seven flats to carry out to the car, along with a new ten-pound bag of fertilizer, to replace the one that had been lost in the recesses of the garage during the winter months. We would then plot out an area in the yard, and begin turning over soil that evening, the soft grunts from our exertion our only company. The following afternoon, we would garden.

I haven't told him about my father because I can't. There are no words to explain why I long to taste the salty rivers streaming off my neck, past the blades of my shoulders. Why each summer I yearn to feel the strain of my back as I crouch over the thick, black loam, unearthing

worms with my trowel, as I dig holes for the flowers to rest in. Why I thrive off the force exerted on my thighs as I carefully beat the dirt around the tiny flowers, and soak in the moist scent of the earth, as the water I saturate their petals with spatters on to my sweat-stained shirt.

So he watches, observes my labor from the kitchen window, and later from the fence surrounding our yard, and still later

from the corner of the lawn he has attached himself to, near my plot. Watches me, and waits. Allows me the time to finish my ritual and shower briefly before roaming out onto the patio to silently survey my work, my father's work.

I lie awake that night, long after we have made quiet love, and savor the dust trapped under my fingernails.

## The Bib-Overalls

On a peg in the closet,  
hang the lifeless bib-overalls  
that Grandpa once wore.  
The fabric is worn,  
torn in some spots.  
like Grampa  
in his last days.

At one time,  
those overalls and Grampa  
were new.  
After years of wear  
and service,  
the spilled chemicals  
ate a hole in the bibs  
as the cancer  
overtook Grampa.

Now, only a  
memory.  
A lifeless  
piece of cloth,  
weathered beyond repair.

A breeze  
from a nearby window,  
catches the overalls.  
Allowing, for a brief moment,  
a stirring of life.  
Grampa . . . . .

I hear the words,  
echoing through the silence.  
"Come child,  
sit on my lap.  
Let me hold you once again."

For a moment I reach for the overalls,  
wishing only that I could.  
So many things I'd say.

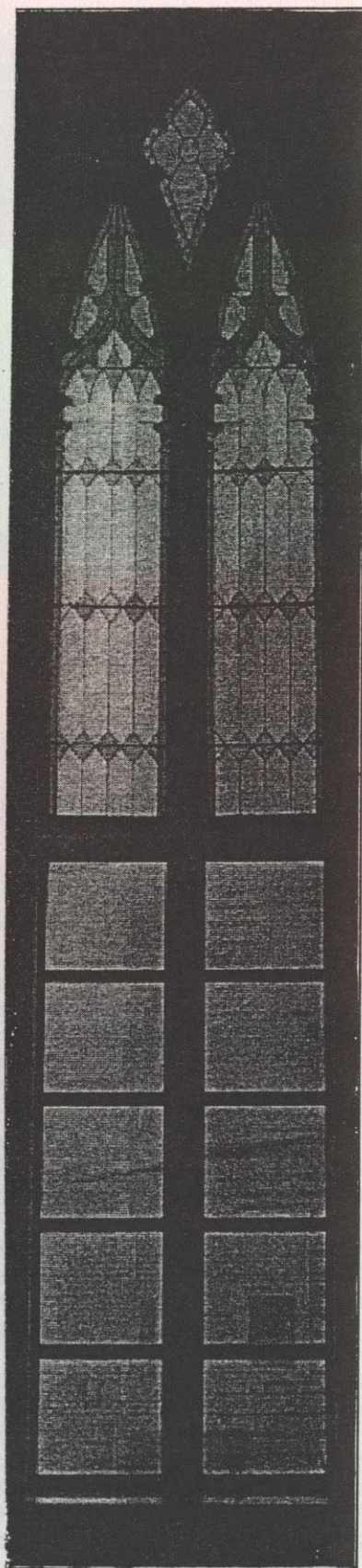
The breeze dies . . . .  
The overalls become life-less again,  
as I stand there,  
fingers closed  
tightly  
around the cloth.

Angie Kenobbie,  
first place poetry



# Self Portrait

Susan Van Rees, essay



**B**lotches of pigment seep into each hint of a recess. Some spots composed of thick, wet impasto linger on the surface, penetrating slowly like cool drops of rain gradually permeating the resisting dry crusted earth. Nothing is left untouched, nothing left unchanged. Ochre streaks my left cheek, cadmium entwines strands of my hair as if it were kissed by the sun. The shirt I meant to take off before I began is now forever marked by Grumbacher's thalo blue. And hands, my hands are the meeting place of all the colors. Here the pigments enter and exit both the canvas and myself through the tips of my fingers.

Spirit, mind, body and brush work as one, tirelessly forming the foundation for what is to follow. The nearly transparent forms and shapes dance about the canvas in subtle blues, grays, and browns knowing that although they will soon be concealed, they are the underpainting, the very life of the work. Stroke after stroke, the image emerges. Pigments respond to the touch of my brush, fleshtones now forming before me, blending and shaping at my will. Color upon color, unintelligible thoughts reveal themselves clearly on canvas; the confused child forever leaves the muddled struggles of puberty and springs forth into new understanding. The passion in her being flows forth from fingertips unaware of any reality except the canvas. It is another world, a reality much preferred to that upon which my feet are placed. Mind racing, eyes scanning, hands instinctively follow suit, adding and destroying, often unaware of their own movement. A glimmer of white on the forehead, a touch of green beneath the eye, a hint of purple under the cheekbone. It is always a self portrait. Hour upon hour flees, yet only a moment has passed in the mind. Completed.

I love to paint, but I'm not much of a writer. I am inseparable from the color which defines both the canvas and myself, but I awkwardly stumble over words, phrases, sentences.

Fingertips hit keys. Wrists straight but relaxed, back erect, feet on the floor, chair pulled at arm's length from table . . . nimble fingers dance, trip and fall on the keyboard. Neckache. Mind overkill. Droopy eyes. Tense stomach. Strands of hair encircle my chair, evidence of my struggle. Letter — word — sentence — paragraph. Meticu-

lous work of the mind and hands. I wish the words would flow forth as freely as the image. Quickly ideas for prose come to mind, but which to follow? The dreaded outline looms before me. I always try to write without it first, but the inevitable happens, and I return to structure I was taught long ago. With each Roman numeral, the passion and desire ebbs away until I write merely to finish what I have begun. Painstakingly I drone onward to the writing.

I begin methodically, religiously following the outline before me; soon distracted, my mind deviates—tangents galore. Heartbeat quickens, heaviness in my chest. Focus, focus. I continue until the stream of paper seems sufficiently long, then print. I struggle through the piece as I proof it, wondering what could possibly have prompted me to write on any subject except the one intended. My paper exits the process severely scathed: it is jumbled, full of arrows, scratches, and meaningless smudges of graphite—evidence of the inevitable revision.

I try again repeating each step. The struggle to find the descriptive adverb—I know it is intentionally hiding in the recesses of my mind, in the lining of my brain. Erase, erase. Thesarus. Must be Writer's block. Again? Rework. Revise. Rework. Revise. Longing for words to drip from my lips, desiring to think in sonnets and poems . . . Frustrated, I quit. I fiercely crumple the paper into a compact wad. The paper sails into the air, hitting the rim of my wastebasket. Wrong. It was all wrong. Head spinning with questions, I yell at myself. No one hears. The thoughts, frustrations, emotions, passion cannot be contained within the 5'4" frame.

Strokes erase the harsh white of the canvas. Torturous beautiful work. And honest. I have found an ally, perhaps even two if desire refuses to give way to frustration. I am not much of a writer, but then again, until last year, I wasn't much of a painter either.



# The Winter House

Kristi Roelfs, fiction

The crisp, white snow lay around the house in uneven piles, remnants from a biting January blizzard. The northern winds blew strongly, testing their strength against the snow scrubbed farm buildings in their path. The old farm house shivered and groaned against the cold, fighting to retain its warmth. The small chimney exhaled its thick gray smoke that the wind quickly chased away. But within, the fire crackled comfortably and burned in its hearth. It added light to the small room inside the house, reflecting the simple furnishings of hard times and the people within.

Four young boys sat on the floor, two involved in a homemade game of checkers while the third watched and learned the game. The fourth child concentrated on homework, reading a well-worn novel for a book report. Each occasionally looked up at the other when whispers escaped their lips, eyes then darting toward Pa. They shivered when the wind howled through the old house. Their mother sat in an old painted rocking chair, busy with knitting needles and a ball of yarn. A finished patchwork quilt covered her faded gray dress and yellowed apron. Wisps of hair fell around her weathered face that had slowly escaped the bobby pins. The father, sitting across the room, relaxed as he extended his legs and crossed them in front of his soft chair, finally warm after a long day's work. He adjusted a strap on his faded blue overalls and then dove his hand into a pocket to find more pipe tobacco before he continued reading.

Pa always read in silence, whether it be an occasional newspaper or the ever present Bible. Silence wasn't necessary for concentration, he knew, but he installed it in his home since he preferred it. The children made enough noise in daylight hours, he reasoned, they should learn silence at night. Everything had its place. The children knew Pa meant it—they saw him break his father's violin over his knee when he was angry. So they played checkers and studied in silence. They knew respect and obedience weighed heavily in his home.

Pa turned his head to watch his wife knit the small afghan and then frowned in disappointment at the pink roses that were stitched in it. He always needed more help out on the farmyard, the eldest weren't quite old enough to begin real men's work. It was all up to him to manage the tidy farm and healthy livestock. Traditions and pride motivated his work. He puffed some tobacco smoke towards his wife. He knew that she worked hard too, but she only had the house to worry herself over.

The meandering smoke slowly drifted over towards Ma and mixed with the dancing wall shadows. She held her breath and watched the ghostly ribbons fade away into the crisp and breathable air. Ma hated the pipe because the smell never left the furniture, the rugs and the clothes, no matter how much she cleaned. She asked him once when she was young and unburdened to stop the ungodly habit. He laughed at her, she remembered, but gave her a half-hearted promise to stop. He promised many things since then. Now she realized that it was easier to wash and clean than to change many of his ways.

She went back to her knitting. She wanted the blanket to be done in time, just in case this time would be different. Sons were a fine gift to be proud of but a daughter would be more hers somehow. Someone she could teach, someone who would look up to her no matter how grown up she became. A daughter wouldn't be put to work outside during the day, doing the chores her father hated to do. She paused with her work to look up at her boys with a slight twinge of guilt. They were good sons that worked hard and behaved most of the time. She hadn't raised complainers. All would become fine farmers like their father, respected in the community. However, her youngest would love something besides his father's ways.

She felt the teacher's letter in her pocket that she determined Pa wouldn't see. The teacher had written, telling her about her son's desire to pursue schoolwork, especially reading and writing. He was meant to go beyond that eighth grade education, maybe even graduate high school, the note continued. Ma wondered what it would be like to go beyond that world of corn fields and harvesting seasons for a moment. And she was surprised that her son had come to realize something besides what his practical father taught. Her imagined thoughts

deceived her only for a moment as she studied her husband while he read. She knew he believed high school wasn't a useful goal for a future farmer. But there still was time to change his mind she hoped.

Pa pulled his pocket watch out and snapped it open with an inflexible glance at his sons. The children looked up with startled attention and silently rose to prepare for bed when he nodded at them. He watched them put away their game of checkers and the books that he considered a waste of time and effort. He didn't learn those fancy things, and yet he became a hard working farmer able to put food on the table for his family. The youngest was only a dreamer. He would be taught what was expected of a future farmer with the reality of hard work this summer. Everyone pulled their weight around here, especially when times were hard.

Ma put down her knitting and proceeded to the children's room. She put her hand on her youngest's head and smiled when he looked up at her, confused and unsure. She whispered for him to tell her what he had read that day once he was ready for bed. Pa watched his wife for a moment. But he returned to reading his newspaper in the silence, puffing smoke from his father's pipe in concentration, occasionally noticing the cold, swirling snow outside his home and wondering when it all would melt.



## the locomotion

of crisp quick perfunctory  
steps (not steps at all  
but instead miniature executions  
of precise military intelligence

left left left right  
left always clear  
defined and demanding  
perfectly aligned allegiance)

camouflage the thundering  
cadence roaring batteries  
screaming children crying  
for mothers that will

never hear the boys  
or hear of except  
at the door as  
We Regret To Inform You

*Kellie Gregg*

## Waiting

*Derek Chinn, fiction*

He waited on the curb, clutching the oblong ball in his tiny arms. The leaves of the oak tree bordering the street had turned orange and scattered around him, contrasting with the dark blue of his wind-breaker. The coat was from the year before and now stopped an inch above his wrists, but it was familiar.

A year before he did not live here, he was in the big brown house, the one out in the country. The nearest neighbor was a mile and a half away. The pasture behind the house presented a new adventure every day. Now he lived in town, surrounded by houses and concrete. The yard was nothing compared to the vastness of the pasture. He felt confined.

The boy zipped up his jacket and hugged the ball tighter as the temperature dropped with the sun. The day started to take on the orange and red hues of sunset. What could be taking so long? Why wasn't the little yellow bug chugging down the street? He got up and kicked the leaves around, making a trail in the loose bed of orange

around him. The trail ran from the street to the front steps of the new house. He walked back and forth in the trail, beating the already brown grass into a light path.

He returned to the curb, waiting. He started to tap his fingers on the ball, nervously anticipating the appearance of the bug. The sun was almost all the way down now, just dark enough for cars to start turning on their headlights. He saw his mother through the bay window in the freshly illuminated living room. She would make him come in soon—it was getting too late for him to be sitting outside by the street. He started to tap the ball faster.

Finally, he heard the sound of the bug struggling to make it up the other side of the hill. He saw the headlights, at first dim, get brighter as the bug crested the hill. He rose from his spot on the curb and, ignoring his new path, ran to the edge of the driveway where the bug always parked.

The battered yellow Volkswagen pulled into the driveway. The engine and the headlights turned off. His father stepped out of

the car, his shirt sleeves rolled up and his tie hanging loosely from his neck. The boy stood there, covered in orange oak leaves and clutching his dad's old high school football. He knew it was too dark to play catch, and his dad was probably too tired, as usual when he came home so late. He started to go in the house when his father touched his shoulder, stopping him.

His father set his briefcase on the lawn and got back into the car and started the engine. The bug backed up into the street and angled so the headlights illuminated the front yard. The bug pulled straight into the driveway with its front tires in the yard to accommodate the two ball players. His father got out of the car and they played catch until the boy was too tired to play, both of them going into the house covered in orange leaves.



# The Hundredth Time

Wendy Hensley, fiction

He watched him watch himself in the mirror, inspecting his face with a critical eye. Sitting cross-legged in the darkened hallway, the soft brown carpet hairs tickling her legs, she sighed contentedly. A golden light spilled into the hallway from the bathroom door. Gazing up, she could see his profile, bare-chested and barefooted on the smooth golden linoleum. He turned on the water and began humming.

Bending over, still humming, he splashed water over his face and rose again, staring straight ahead at the reflection that she could not see but knew was there.

He was in light. She was in darkness. It was dusk, and the rest of the house was in that time when it's just bright enough to not need lights, but dark enough to make it hard to see. But this room was warm and light.

The water stopped. She held her breath expectantly. She knew what would come next. She closed her eyes and listened, imagining every movement just as she had seen them a hundred times.

First he picked up the shaving cream. Then he squirted some onto his left hand. *Pssshhhht*. Setting it down, *clank*, he clapped his hands together, lathered them up and then lathered his face. *Slap. Rub.* Next he rinsed his hands, *splooosh, splooosh, SPLOOSH*. Then, taking the razor, he stopped humming.

She waited, not daring to open her eyes. Waiting, waiting. Finally, he began to sing.

She sighed and opened her eyes, smiling. "I have a friend, her name is Anna..." The razor kept rhythm — *phisht, whisht, ploop, dripdrip, phisht, whisht, ploop, dripdrip*. She pulled her knees up and rested her chin. They were all nonsense songs, made up as he went along. But that didn't matter, because he made them up about her. She saw him glance at her out of the corner of the one eye she could see. "...she's kind of yellow, like a banana..." She giggled, and he grinned and sang louder. "But we're the best of friends, yes we are, yes we are. We like to go for rides on shooting stars, shooting stars..." The more she giggled, the louder and sillier the songs became. Her eyes filled with wonder as the words flowed from his mouth. He sang boisterously as his left hand wildly directed an accompanying orchestra. His feet stomped in rhythm, while the right hand continued shaving. Magically, the white cream dis-

appeared neatly from his face. By now, the orchestra had turned into a marching band as he sang the praises of shared peanut butter sandwiches and "Gunsmoke". With a few last strokes — *whisht, whisht, wisht, wisht wishhhh*, he slammed down the razor at the climax of the chorus. Bending again, the song would get lost in a *SPLASH!* covering his face, then the *gurgle gurgle* of the drain, and finally the last notes would trail off, muffled in a towel. "AHHHHHHH!" He turned to face her, his frame blocking the doorway. His face broke into an expression of mock surprise.

"Why, Anna, how long have you been sitting there?"

She giggled and his lanky legs covered the distance between them in one step as he bent to tickle her. She squealed and he scooped her over his shoulder in one easy motion. He was by no means huge, but his tall figure was sinewy and strong. Hanging upside down, the blood rushed to Anna's head, and she laughed again as he carried her off to the kitchen like a pirate hauling his latest plunder.

"Friedrich! You put her down this instant! She'll get sick! Anna, come peel some potatoes for me," a voice piped up from the kitchen.

Laughing, they both ignored the voice. "She can't, Mother, she stings like a bee," Friedrich rhymed. Anna laughed harder and Friedrich marched through the small living room into the kitchen and around and around, circling his mother. The voice grew shrill in an attempt to be heard over Anna's giggling and pleas to be let down.

"All right, Mother," Friedrich finally said. Bending forward, he placed Anna on her feet again. "Serves you right for listening in on my rehearsals," he said to her, a crooked grin lighting his face.

Anna turned to the drawer to find the potato peeler.

"Well, I suppose I should head over to pick up Kathy," Friedrich commented casually. Anna groaned inwardly. How could she have forgotten? Tonight was the night Friedrich was bringing "company" over. *Well, she's just his tutor. I bet she's really ugly*, thought Anna, giggling to herself. "You'd better get going or you won't have time to stop at Griswold's market and get me some more onions like you promised. Anna, not those potatoes, the ones in the pot near the sink."

Friedrich took the money his mother

handed him, winking at Anna. "Now I can buy you a mink," he said with a sly smile. Anna laughed as her mother rolled her eyes.

"Get going, son!" his mother said in mock exasperation. He reached out to tousle Anna's hair, planted a kiss on his mother's cheek and ran out of the kitchen.

"Don't go away, Anna, I heard a joke at school today that I want to tell you when I get back." He threw the words over his shoulder and was gone.

Anna smiled to herself and turned her attention to the small brown potato in her hand. Friedrich was always trying to make her laugh. Ever since their father had died in the war, Friedrich had taken over the role of the man of the house. He had worked hard to take care of his mother and sister, holding down a part-time job and attempting to get good grades at the same time. Anna was very proud of him. He had that rare gift of knowing oneself; of not caring what others thought. He was her best friend in the world, and she idolized him.

She finished one potato and reached for another. The kitchen was warm, and her mother bustled about behind her, stirring boiling pots and slicing vegetables. Anna concentrated on getting every strip of brown off the smooth white potato. Her mother switched on the radio and began humming in a low melancholy tone. Anna turned suddenly. She had never heard her mother hum before. She opened her mouth to say something, then thought better of it and turned thoughtfully to her potato. Anna lost track of time and was suddenly startled from the potatoes by the sound of the front door opening, followed by musical laughter. Anna cast a glance at her mother, who had stopped humming and put down her knife. Wiping her hands on her apron, she crossed the room and turned into the hallway. Anna abandoned her gleaming white potatoes and, hurriedly drying her hands on a towel that hung near the sink, ran to follow her mother.

Friedrich stood in the shadows of the entryway, laughing as he closed the door and stomped the snow from his boots. Beside him, a figure stood in the dim light. Anna's mother reached behind her and switched on the light. Bathed in the golden glow, Anna blinked momentarily and looked up at the girl. She was laughing, snowflakes shaking off her coat and falling to the floor to melt in a puddle as Friedrich helped her struggle out of her



bondage. Anna's gaze took in the girl's stylish galoshes and her navy school uniform, emblazoned with a coat of arms and the words "St. Mary's" on the pocket. The girl turned toward Anna as Friedrich finally hung up the coat. She was the most beautiful girl Anna had ever seen. Dinner would be insufferable. Anna's entire body stiffened and her mouth drew into a straight line.

"Look, I found a starving peasant girl on the street," Friedrich joked.

The girl laughed again, a row of perfect white teeth flashing warmth. Her face was smooth and olive colored. Her eyes, dark and wide, surrounded by inky black lashes, glowed with secret delight. Her dark straight hair was pulled back at the temples, hanging in a glimmering sheath down her back. She was perfect. Hmmp. Too perfect. Anna crossed her arms in the most unfriendly fashion. The girl turned and smiled at her, looking directly into her eyes.

"Anna, mother, this is my friend, her name is Kathy."

*Kind of sour, like salt water taffy*, Anna sung in her head.

"Nice to meet you, Kathy," her mother was saying. Anna was only vaguely aware of the conversation; she was trying to imagine how Friedrich would make up the next line of the song.

"Anna! ANNA!" It was her mother, nudging her and giving her a stern look. "Where are your manners? Your brother has just introduced his friend Kathy. What do you say?"

Anna blushed and dropped her arms. What she wanted to say was *'Great big ball made of clay,'* but she didn't suppose her mother would appreciate that. Instead, she looked at her brother's face, then at the girl. Taking a step forward, she said "How do you do," curtsied, and stepped back, blushing again.

"Well, fine thank you, Anna," Kathy returned politely.

"Really, Kathy, she usually talks your ear off. I don't know what's gotten into her tonight," Anna's mother said with an amused look on her face. "Friedrich, perhaps our guest would like to see some of our family pictures. Anna, come help me finish dinner," she said with a stern look. She smiled again at Kathy, and returned to the kitchen.

"Well, you're a lot more grown-up than your brother described you, Anna," said

Kathy. "I must admit," she added conspiratorially, "I was a little worried about meeting you. I was afraid you wouldn't approve of your brother's choice of friends." She smiled and winked at Anna. Anna suddenly found herself smiling back. Before Anna had a chance to respond, Friedrich led Kathy into the parlor, tousling Anna's hair as he passed her. Annoyed, Anna ducked her head and turned toward the kitchen.

Why did she find herself liking this creature that so monopolized Friedrich's attention? She wanted Friedrich to tell Kathy to leave. She wanted him to stop laughing and talking to Kathy and pay attention to her. Yet every time Kathy smiled at Anna or asked her a question, Anna found herself wanting Kathy to stay. The way Kathy treated Anna made her feel grown-up. Anna had to admit that Friedrich treated her more like a child than the young lady she was becoming.

Her mother's voice drifted down the hall. "Better peel another potato, Anna." She had begun to hum again, this time a happier tune. Standing in the middle of the warm kitchen, Anna heard a peal of musical laughter.

Suddenly the negative feelings surfaced again. "Why does Friedrich get out of all the work?" she demanded.

"Because he has a guest to entertain, dear. You know, Anna, things don't always stay the same," her mother said gently, turning from the counter where she was cutting vegetables. "Friedrich won't stay

here forever, and neither will you. There comes a time when we have to let go and allow time to 'grow us up' a bit." Anna's mother quickly wiped her eyes as she turned back to her vegetables.

Anna knew her mother was right. Friedrich was growing up. She could not command his complete attention anymore. That meant she had to share. Sullenly, Anna retreated to the cool, dark pantry to retrieve another potato. In a last moment of desperate selfishness, she put her hand on the smallest, most pathetic potato. Instantly, she scolded herself and, instead took the biggest one. Sighing, she sat again at the stool and began peeling.

"Was that a sulky sigh I heard?"

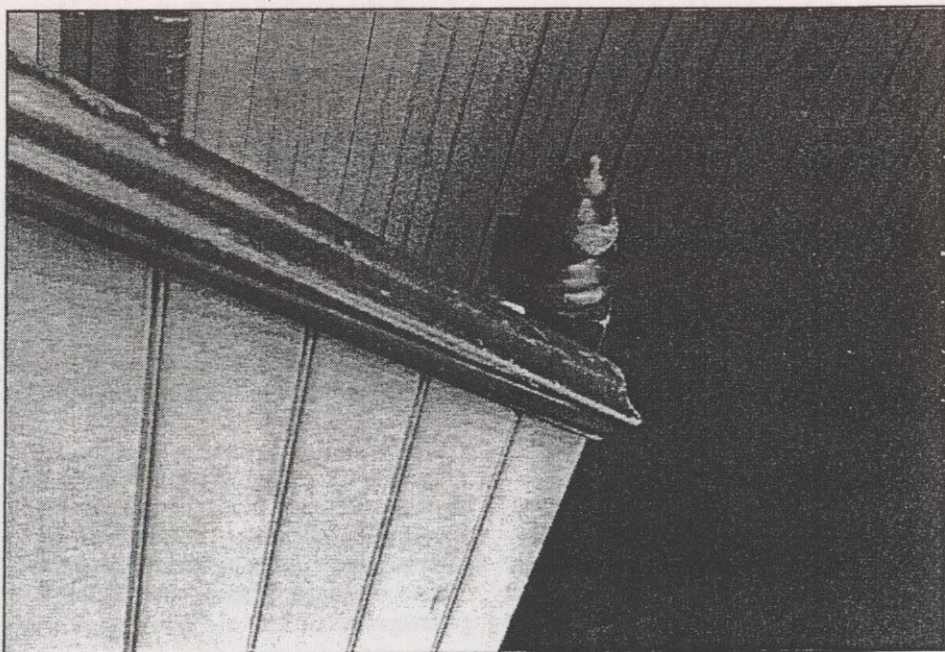
"No, just a giving-in sigh, Mother," Anna returned as she thought of Friedrich and Kathy in the bright parlor, laughing over photo albums.

"Hey, Anna, come in here!" Friedrich called. "I'm showing her the pictures we took at the Grand Canyon. Remember how Father had to carry you because you had a broken leg from falling off the swings?"

"She's nice, isn't she, really?" Anna said faintly.

A hand rested on her shoulder, another took the potato from her hands. "Father would like her," she added, almost to herself.

She stood, took a deep breath, turned to her mother, and called "Coming!" as she returned her mother's quiet smile.





# The Gull Tamer

Jennifer Messer, fiction

The voices of sea gulls filled the sky as a company of them flew over Lydia's head showing off their crazy dances. Matthew had probably found the majority of them and scared them away from wherever they were before, causing them to leave in a rampage. Mischief seemed to be one of his main *fortés* lately. Lydia could rattle off a string of Matthew's neighborhood disruptions as long as a child's Christmas list. There were windows broken by Matthew's "innocent curve ball," stolen loaves of bread intended to feed "helpless" sea gulls, and other paraphernalia known to be missing in the neighborhood, which magically showed up in Matthew's bedroom.

Lydia checked her watch, 12:15. Thomas was late and Matthew was still nowhere to be seen. Lydia scanned the docks for any trace of Matthew. After throwing a tantrum, he had run further down the shore and had yet to return. Lydia shrugged her shoulders, realizing the boy always ran off on a rampage when told he could not have his way. Let him go bother the sea gulls, she thought, as she slid her slender hands into the pockets of her jeans. His father would be meeting her at the docks soon for their afternoon cruise around the lake, and he could track Matthew down.

Lydia sat observing the commotion of the public docking area from Thomas's boat, which had its own space at the far end of the dock to the left side. Across from her, an old man was untying the ropes of his small yacht, probably for a pleasant afternoon cruise. Children scurried about hauling their shovels and sand pails, beach towels, inner tubes, and fishing poles in and out of the smaller boats, preparing them for an afternoon ride. Again, Lydia scanned the area for Matthew, but it was obvious that Matthew was not going to return on his own.

Deciding to find Matthew so they would be ready to go when Thomas arrived, Lydia re-traced her footsteps down the wooden boards of the dock. Perhaps Matthew had found the gulls by the big climbing rocks. She imagined Matthew playing in the lake, soaked head to toe; another walking disaster.

Lydia walked down the shore of the beach, feeling the warm, grainy sand slip through her toes. She noticed the sea shells poking through the sand and remembered when she used to collect them along the

shore as a child. She would save them in a special white bucket that she had painted with bright colors. She remembered keeping them to herself, as her very own treasure, until a special occasion would come up and she would decide to give one away. Perhaps she could interest Matthew in sea shell collecting.

As Lydia rounded the bend of the rocky point, she saw Matthew standing confidently on the top of a big boulder which sat in about three feet of water. Lydia's mouth opened, ready to call out his name, beckoning him to quit his foolishness and hurry back to the docks. But, instead, no words came out.

Matthew, obviously, was not splashing crazily through the water, nor had he scrounged up a loaf of bread from someone's yacht at the docks, with which to feed the sea gulls. Instead, he stood frozen on the top of the boulder in his old jean shorts and untucked white tee-shirt. Matthew's light brown curly hair stood on end as his head tilted back watching the sea gulls above, as if he controlled them.

Lydia moved to a rock close to her and sat down wondering what Matthew could be up to. She tipped her head up, as Matthew did, and watched the sea gulls swarm over the sandy white beach. Their long, white wings spread freely, soaring through the air and creating a crowd of moving white specks. Lydia smiled as she realized that the sea gulls were creating art, making their own original patterns just like her latest abstract painting full of spirals of vibrant colors.

The sea gulls even appeared as art themselves. The sky was full of illusions of chalked patterns continuously appearing, only to be erased, as pure white chalk dust fell lightly below and disappeared changing the pattern. More gulls dove downward and blended with the white sands leaving their where-about's a mystery.

Of course they had dove down to skim the brim of the lakes in search of something to eat, hadn't they? It was only an illusion that they created, a revealed magic act. She would not trust their gimmicks of deception.

Lydia felt the hard rock beneath her with the palm of her hand. Its rough surface displayed many grooves and bumps. She wondered how many people must have sat on this very rock before just watching the gulls.

The rocks were in a prime spot, being far enough to escape distractions from the boats at the docks, and near enough to see all the action around. Yet here, at this moment, in this time, there was only Matthew, the sea gulls, and herself.

The white feathers, sand, and sea all blended so smoothly together that the image became a collage of white in the breeze. And there stood Matthew, on the top of the boulder, body straight and tall, and arms crossed, as if he was the powerful director of all the art the sea gulls displayed. The gull tamer, Lydia thought.

Lydia checked her watch, 12:30. Thomas should surely be at the docks waiting for them by now. Lydia stood, still keeping her eyes on Matthew. She would leave the rocks and go quietly back to the dock. Matthew would come when he was ready; or not. She was not going to disturb him.

"Lydia, watch my sea gulls!" cried Matthew.

Lydia spun around, startled by Matthew's shrill voice and surprised by his observance that she was there.

"I have been," replied Lydia, "and they are quite entertaining. Matthew your father should be waiting for us at the docks, Are you ready to go?"

Matthew had turned his back to her again and proceeded to watch the gulls above him. Lydia sighed at his ignorance and walked to the edge of the lake.

"Matthew, did you hear me?" called Lydia.

"Yeah, I heard."

Matthew turned his head of curls around to look Lydia in the eyes.

"Lydia, did you know that sea gulls are actually white knights in disguise?" announced Matthew.

"Oh, are they?" Lydia chuckled.

Matthew turned around, again fixing his body in the original position. Curious about Matthew's new proclamation about the artful sea gulls, Lydia waded out to join Matthew on the huge rock in the water. She reached the boulder, and Matthew took a step to the right to make room for Lydia to stand on the left side. Lydia climbed the rock and stood beside Matthew taking his identical position and looking up at the gulls.

"And why is it that sea gulls remind you of white knights, Matthew?" Lydia asked.

"Well, because all the people in the palace where the white knights used to live



filled up all the space with busy markets and shops. Then there was no room for the white knights to ride their horses and joust. So, then a fairy turned them all into sea gulls, and off they flew in search for some land to build a new palace on. But, they haven't found any yet, so here they are."

Lydia studied the gulls, listening to their shrills of haughty laughter which poured out of each and every one. Perhaps they could remind her of a flock of disguised royal jesters from a king's court, but they seemed too obnoxious to be white knights. In the sky, one gull chased another, participating in a chaotic game of tag. Then a line of gulls joined the two and daringly swooped downward racing for a prize below. Seemingly

content with their bizarre actions, the frenzied feathered sea gulls continued in their jovial fiasco. How beautiful, yet annoying sea gulls could be, Lydia thought.

Lydia again checked her watch, 12:45. She knew Thomas would be at the docks waiting, and that it was now too late for a boat ride this afternoon. Thomas had to be back at work around 1:00. "I'm sure your father's waiting at the boat for us, Matthew." Lydia said softly.

"Yeah, I know." Matthew answered as he took a seat on the boulder.

"Well, it's too late to go for a cruise around the lake, but I'm sure he's looking for us. Are you ready to go?"

Matthew jumped off the rock into the

cold, three-foot deep water and began wading to the shore, slapping the water as he went. Lydia watched him thoughtfully, his messy light brown curls blowing in the breeze, and his white tee-shirt glowing against the blue lake water. As Matthew reached the shore, Lydia noticed that there were no more sea gulls on the beach and the sky had returned to its everyday shade of blue, void of any white specks. So much for an enjoyable afternoon cruise with Thomas, Lydia thought. Carefully, she slipped off the rock following Matthew back to the beach, and then slowly down the shore toward the docks in search of Thomas.

## Leaves

*Melissa Lovegren, fiction*

They were teasing her again. The other kids always laughed because she liked to read, because she would rather read than talk to them. They didn't know what adventures and creatures came alive and lived inside you when you opened a book. What was a conversation about soccer or the new kid or the soup in the cafeteria that just HAD to have worms in it, compared to a world where fairies floated and willow nymphs laughed and beckoned. "Four-eyes, Four-eyes," they yelled, red, wet tongues flopping, "YOU'll have to wear glasses."

Soon they grew tired of their teasing and clumped away to some other loud game. She was alone again, and the girl let the stillness melt into her. The gentle ticking of the old hickory-dickory clock matched her heart beat, soothing her. Tick, tock, tick, tock. The clamoring voices of the other kids were muffled into extinction.

The girl closed her book, letting its pages

ruffle over the tips of her fingers, and crept to the side door. A breeze lifted her hair and tickled her ear. In front of her was her tree. Softly walking to it, she reached out her fingers and let them skim lightly over the roughness of the trunk. She leaned in closer, placing her cheek against it. Her arms wrapped round as far as they could reach and she let a sigh seep out and mingle with the air around her. The leaves rustled softly, gladly. Did you miss me? whispered the girl. The leaves again rustled, dipping slightly downward. Placing a light kiss against the bark, the girl bent down and pushed the grass aside with one hand. Exploring with the fingers of the other, she felt gently for the small opening at the base of the tree. She smiled as her fingers brushed against the smoothness of the rock hidden inside. It was her special rock, the one she'd found the day they went to the beach. The leaves bent in closer and the girl tilted her head back, looking up into their mellow greenness. "Shhhhhh," she whispered, putting a finger to her lips and winking.

The sudden noise of the voices of the other kids warned the girl that they were coming towards her. Deftly, she replaced

the rock, brushing the grass the other way to cover the opening. She straightened and put her arm around the tree, giving it a small squeeze. Looking up again at the leaves she murmured, "You won't tell, will you." The other kids came around the sharp corner. The girl waited in the green world beneath the leafy branches which creaked faintly, letting the breeze that kissed the back of the girl's neck carry a promise swirling downward. "It's four-eyes!" screeched the older kids when they saw her. The girl stood still, and then, as her fingers brushed the familiar roughness, she smiled, the creases in her cheeks deepening softly.



# Her Waking

Kelly Mowrer, fiction, honorable mention

*I've decided to go back to Boston. Dave called and I think it's going to work this time. He's changed a lot since I've talked to you about him, so feel free to get the look I know is there off your face. I know you don't like the sounds of him, but you've never really liked anyone I've been with. And he makes me happy. I'll be back at my old address starting the 17th, in case you decide to write. Maybe talk to you soon. Take care. Love Aly.*

The afternoon was gray; it was raining but the wind wasn't blowing very hard. Shaking her head, Annie read the letter once more and then tossed it onto the table next to the Penney's catalog that had arrived the day before. She didn't order from Penney's catalogs. But someone kept sending them, so she always just tossed them onto the table. She moved toward the refrigerator, frowning, thirsty. She hummed a Joni Mitchell song that was in her head from the night before. *Trina wears her wampum beads, she fills her drawing book with line . . . And her coat's a second-hand one, trimmed in antique luxury. She is a lady of the canyon.* Pieces of songs always stuck in her head after nights like that, the sort of nights that ask to have songs written about them. Annie was in no shape to do such a thing, so Joni Mitchell got her through.

There were other ladies of the canyon in that song, what were their names again? Oh, Annie—how could she forget that one?—and Stella was it? No—Estrella, yes, the circus girl wrapped in songs and gypsy shawls . . . She used to breathe Joni Mitchell. She poured herself a glass of wine and moved into the room she called her studio. Hardwood floors, white walls, lots of windows. An easel was set up in the corner, and three guitars leaned on the wall beside it. Her stereo sat in there, too, and she went to it. Joni's *Ladies of the Canyon* was already in from last night so she hit number four and sat on her stool behind the easel, right next to a window.

She wouldn't write back, she knew as

she reached for a drawing pencil. It wouldn't help. Annie had tried before to make her sister understand that she didn't have to go through everything she had to learn the same lessons. Aly was stubborn, always had to touch the stove before she really believed it was hot—well, hot enough to burn her. Annie thought back to all the different guys she had lived with when she was Aly's age. She had been into experimentation then. Tried them on, took them off, tried them on again. She had produced a lot of good art during that time, but of course that didn't justify her foolishness. But surely her foolishness didn't justify all the hell they had given each other during those years.

Those years weren't ones she was proud of. In fact, she spent a lot of time trying to get away from them, from what they put inside her. But they wouldn't leave her alone. She still had to walk a lot, in the rain, feeling the wetness on her face, feeling it washing her. She had tried to make Aly understand this pain of hers, to show her where it came from so that she wouldn't have to find out on her own. Obviously she had failed. Annie looked hard at what she had drawn—a faceless woman sitting cross-legged in a field. She had placed a single tree in that field. No, she wouldn't write her back.

Annie spun her seat so that she could look out the window. Still raining. The raindrops were trickling down the pane, creeping like bashful tears along the glass. She liked that the sky was gray and losing itself. The trees in the yard caught the sky's dripping sorrow and held it, but not for long. Lamentations flow downward and have to keep going. But they leave a trail behind them. Raindrops always leave a trail. So do people. She went to the stereo, took off Joni Mitchell with a long and drawn-out sigh, and put in Carole King.

*Sometimes I wonder if I'm ever gonna make it home again, it's so far and out of sight. I really need someone to talk to, and nobody else knows how to comfort me tonight. Snow is cold, rain is wet—chills my soul right to the marrow. I won't be happy till I see you alone again, till I'm home again and feeling right.* Annie always played Carole King on gray and rainy days like this when she got a letter from Aly. Her sister had been all over the country in the last three or four years. She'd lived with as many guys, and two women that she knew of. Aly had been

just about everywhere—everywhere except Portland. She hadn't even come to help Annie move. She did write, however. And Annie phoned her now and then, when she could track her down. But for the most part, Aly was out there, somewhere, with someone Annie had never met or spoken to.

Annie left her stool to go get another glass of wine and brought the bottle back with her. She had read the letter again, of course, on her way past the table. Never had she been able to understand the way Aly hurt herself like she did, over and over. She thought back to her own twenties—to Tony, Max, Liam, Michael. Cigarettes. Joints. Blues bars. Living during the night while the *productive* members of society slept. Seattle night life had been nothing if not entertaining. During that time, she had made enough money to live selling her paintings at local shows, and got some of her writing published in various magazines here and there along the way. And now she did much the same thing—painting, sculpting, composing music, and writing, of course. She hadn't had to have a *real* job since she was a teen, which suited her rather well.

Some clear evenings she and some friends had taken their guitars to the noisy street corners to play for the crowds rushing along the sidewalk. Most times there wasn't much money in her old guitar case when they left, but she liked to watch people watch them. Every now and then someone would stop and really listen—not just hear them in passing, but listen. Annie remembered one woman who heard their music one evening and stopped short. She had just stood there as the flow of people surged past her, like a stubborn water weed interrupts a stream. The woman must have been about twenty-four or five. Her hair was brown, shoulder-length—Annie would never forget her—and she was wearing jeans and a dark shirt, a flannel. She had some old black boots on, she looked worn. Annie had noticed right away when the woman walked up that she had a book in her hand. She strained to read its nearly worn-away title—*The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke*. She held it comfortably,



like you see people holding their favorite coffee cup. Its old cover was black, faded, like her boots.

The sky had been getting darker, the sun was just about down. The woman stood to the side of them, half in a shadow, half out, but only for only a few minutes, then she sat down there on the corner. Annie and her friends were playing Bob Dylan tunes that night, angry songs, and this woman seemed to know them; her lips moved with Annie's and her head went gently from side to side. She sat with her knees pulled up close, with the book between her legs and chest, and her arms wrapped around and held her legs, tight. Annie wished she'd brought her sketch book, she'd never wanted to draw anyone so badly. The woman's hands were incredible. There were three or four silver rings on her right hand, only one on her left. A wedding ring. A plain silver band, no engagement diamond. The skin on her hands was soft, smooth, just beautiful—but the woman didn't seem to notice. She only sat there, swaying slightly to the moving notes of the guitars, looking either at the cement in front of her or closing her eyes. But even with her eyes closed, her eyebrows and forehead wrinkled.

When they finished the song they were playing—"The Times They Are A-Changin'," she thought it had been—Annie and her friends began "All Along the Watchtower." She sang it, her voice rough, raw. But it was a rough song, meant for angry, raw passion. *There must be some kind of way outta here, said the joker to the thief. . . . There are those among us right here, right now that still see life as some kind of joke. But you and I, we have been through that. I tell you that this, this is not our fate.* Annie had watched this woman closely while she sang, and found herself following the tears that began to run down the woman's face. Surely angels look like this woman is what Annie thought that night singing on the corner of First Avenue and Pike Street, watching an unexplained sorrow stream from this woman's ocean-blue eyes. Her eyes were like the surface of the ocean, waves breaking all through them. The guitars spoke above the noise of the crowd, and more people had wandered over to listen. But the woman sat inside herself, alone, on the corner, not noticing the crowd that had gathered to watch Annie and her friends.

The guitars slowed and Annie's voice softened into an almost pleading tone. The woman sat crying, silently, but made no move to hide her tears. They just ran down her cheeks, to her jaw, and fell to her knees. Some made their way over her cheekbones to her lips and into her barely-open mouth. The music gained speed and intensity, and Annie exploded into *You gotta take someone's hand, you gotta learn to make your stand. And it's one, two, three, four, look at the sky you can open the door, and take my hand, take my hand, take my hand. . . .* Annie was nearly shouting, her soul charged her tongue. But she did not hear the sound of her voice or the guitars strumming madly around her. She only saw this woman's tears and heard the cries the woman's mouth would not allow her to release. Annie's voice was desperate, begging almost. *Don't you want to touch, don't you want to feel, don't you know that this is real. . . . Save yourself, save yourself. . . .*

The woman closed her eyes. It was as if she was oblivious to everything going on around her, except the music. The music. She seemed to be living off of it, breathing it in. Annie knew how to breathe music; someone else's passion had kept her alive more than once. She sang as though her voice was the force that contracted the woman's heart, that sent air deep into her lungs. The music calmed down again, and Annie trembled as she sang. *You, and you, and you are a part of the world. You you you are a part of the world. You gotta learn to touch, to feel, know that you are real. I said learn, learn you are a part of the world.* Annie breathed out these last words and watched through her own tears as the woman opened her eyes, worked the silver wedding ring off her finger, tossed it into the tattered guitar case, stood up, and walked slowly away with fresh tears running

down her face.

That was the last time Annie had seen the woman. As she looked out the window at the persistent rain, Annie thought of her walking away from the street corner with a bare left hand. It looked stronger without the silver interruption. She had kept the woman's ring. Annie got off the stool, left her studio, and went into her bedroom to get it. She had had dreams about this woman, this nameless woman who had walked into and out of her life on a Seattle street corner during an evening of Bob Dylan. In the dreams the woman always played guitar and was always sitting in the same place. And in these dreams her name was always Aly.

Aly. And all those men . . . they'd been through it so many times. Annie had been through it so many times. Why couldn't Aly just stop, just open her eyes and walk away? That crying woman could stop hurting herself. She threw her wedding ring into a stranger's guitar case, for God's sake. Annie went to the kitchen table and read the letter once more. *I'll be back at my old address. . . .* Yes, she would. Annie walked back into her studio and sat down in the middle of the floor, her arms hugging her legs to her chest, tight. She held the ring in her left hand and just sat there, on the floor, wanting to be back on that street corner watching the worn and beautiful woman rip herself and then walk away, holding onto that book of poetry and not bothering to wipe the tears away.



# To Hear the Sunrise

Jennifer Messer, fiction

I sat waiting in my wrinkled business suit, forcing myself to stay alert to the activity of the chaotic terminal. Cigarette smoke filled the air where most of the people sat and jabbered, so I had taken a seat across the room near the wide windows in hopes that some fresh air would creep in and help clear my head. My left hand gripped the handle of a floral print suitcase, while my eyes kept quick note of the remaining baggage scattered around me. Keeping track of this luggage was a situation I had tackled before, but the anxiety of boarding a plane was something I did not remember experiencing.

An information board posted above, reported a hazy 4:30 a.m. As I looked out the window, the report was confirmed; only a mixture of neon city lights glimmered beyond the motionless runways. Like the foggy skies, the whole day had been a blur from the moment I heard about the crash. The brief story Mom told on the phone ran repeatedly through my thoughts as I wove together hundreds of scenarios of what had really happened.

5:30 came, and I still waited. The weather delay was taking longer than expected. I tried to relax, realizing that straining to answer the unanswerable was only increasing the throbbing in my head. Outside, the sunrise broke through the heavy gray velour drapes of fog. I remembered him.

He loved the sunrise. It liberated him for the new day just as it freed the vivid mesh of pink, orange, and yellow hues to parade through the blue expanse. Every morning he got his pipe and quietly sat in the rocking chair in the living room. Puffs of cherry rose tobacco filled the house, as he peered straight through the sliding glass doors toward the back yard. There, the sunrise drifted up above the cornfields from behind our row of pine trees. Sometimes, he would even venture out to the porch in the cold, brisk morning air in his terry cloth robe and moccasins.

I remember the first time I saw him outside. I was in the kitchen getting some medicine for a cough. As I stood on my tip toes to place the medicine back in the cupboard, I looked through the kitchen window, and there he was, standing in the middle of the porch. I wouldn't have bothered him, but he saw me too. So, I followed my curiosity outside, through the sliding

doors, and asked him what he was doing standing in the middle of the porch at 6:00 in the morning.

He sighed as he kept his position and took the wood pipe from his bearded face with his right hand. Then, he glanced over his shoulder and replied, "I wanted to hear the sunrise."

I lingered a moment, watching him as he turned back to the view above the pine trees. Then, I turned and proceeded quietly back inside to my warm, cozy bed.

On many various occasions, I would catch him out there watching the sunrise. I began asking him, "Are you listening to the sunrise again?"

He would always give me a kindly nod or a gentle yes and ask me if I could hear it; but I never could.

Then, one day, full of curious suspicion, I waited until we all gathered for breakfast, and asked him just what it was that the sunrise had said to him that morning.

He paused, set down his fork full of hot scrambled cheese eggs, looked me directly in the eyes and said, "Samantha, if you want to know what the sunrise said, you will have to come and listen to it."

Time passed, and one morning I decided to discover the mysterious voice of his sunrise for myself. I crept out of bed, shuffled up the basement steps and through the house, and carefully made my way to the porch. Through the sliding doors, shivers snuck up my spine as I met the chilling morning air. I stood in my nightshirt with one foot overlapping another. The sunrise was there, but he wasn't; not even a scent of cherry rose tobacco could be traced. I stayed anyway, and took a seat on the green picnic bench to listen. Nothing. Nothing was there. Only a few birds searching for breakfast, some wind in the trees bustling dry leaves, and my own fingers rhythmically striking the table.

That afternoon, when I asked why he hadn't been outside to view the sunrise, mom told me that he had gone flying with a friend, and that he was taking lessons to get a pilot's license. I was a bit befuddled by the fact that I hadn't heard anything about this sooner, but I accepted it, realizing how often I was actually around.

When he came home that night, I asked him if he heard the sunrise that morning. Responding in a calm voice, he said, "Not only did I hear the sunrise, but I flew through it."

Then, with a glowing expression, he told me that when he got his license I could go up and fly through the sunrise with him.

Four months later he had his license. Now, he would always tune in to the 6:00 evening news to listen to the weather forecast for the next day. If the weather held true to a prediction of still winds and sunny, clear skies, you could be sure he'd be up flying the next morning.

Some evenings he'd say to me, "The sunrise is going to sing tomorrow. I'm going up in the morning if you want to come."

He never really asked me to go, or told me that he really wanted me to go, but I knew he did.

My usual reply was, "That would be fun! I'll see if I can get up." But I didn't.

Now here I sat, over twenty years later, wanting to take a ride that would never come, and dreading the ride I had to take. I had ridden on the great winged machines that flew me so quickly around the country to my business meetings on numerous occasions. Too many times to even remember the first.

Finally, my plane rumbled into position to prepare for its next journey. The robust form shimmered, silently inviting, but I no longer trusted it. He trusted them though. He would have enjoyed this trip, even in a large passenger plane.

There it sat, a sturdy, mighty object silhouetted against a blossomed sunrise patiently waiting for its passengers. At that moment, I longed to follow him; to fly with my father. The stewardess called my flight number. I gathered together my luggage and walked peacefully to the gate. Home was the only word remaining vividly in my head, and the sunrise was what I was going home to hear.



# Remembering

Lorinda Van Roekel, fiction

It is a crisp fall day in 1976. I am a six-year-old with shiny white hair and two missing front teeth. My grandma is over, having a gossip session in the kitchen with my mother. The TV is on, as always, broadcasting some Hawaiian show that is one of my favorites. In between imitating the hula dancers and chatting with grandma and mother, I am trying to get dressed.

I need to pick out my underwear. I have panties which I love that have the days of the week embroidered on them. My only problem is that I cannot read yet. But, being the six-year-old perfectionist that I am, I need to have the right day of the week on. I go into the kitchen wearing only a pink pair of panties and ask the women folk if I have the right day on. They inform me "no" and then laugh. I run back to my room, change into a different pair, pray it's the right day, and run back again. Wrong pair. Back to my room. I run back and forth to my room at least six times, until coming to the last pair—finally the right day.

It is 1979. I am at my grandmother's house on a Sunday afternoon. My cousins and I are playing in her kitchen of all places. Being adventurous, I climb up on the cupboards and grab a can of Kool-Aid. For no reason, I take the can, shake it as hard as I can, and deeply inhale the powdery mist that is produced. I sneeze and also tempt my cousins to do the same. "Get out of that!" yells my mother through the dining room. Grandma just laughs.

Those memories that I recollect are basically not even about grandma. I mean she's in the picture, but just there. A part of the background.

Sometimes I feel guilty for not remembering more of her. The fact is that the details that I do remember concern mostly

me. There seems to be a selfishness in what my mind allows me to remember.

I am now 16. I have grown older and, sadly, so has grandma. Grandma loses her dentures, forgets to shut off the stove, doesn't remember where she left her glasses—things like that. The family puts her in a nursing home where she will spend the next eight or nine years. She forgets more and more. Finally can't even remember my mom's name.

"I think she can recognize me, though," my mom tells me. I wonder if she is right.

People say grandma is just a shell; gone is the person she once was.

*I wonder who she really was.*

It is fall 1993. Grandma has just died. At the funeral the minister speaks about how grandma loved living on the farm, how she would milk the cows, how she was always there to listen to her family when they needed her.

*In a way I feel cheated.*

## Late Harvest

Clouds cover the sky  
keeping the heavens warm  
as the snow falls lightly,  
blanketing the fields of corn.

A light escapes  
from beneath the door  
of the Morton Building.  
Inside, a weary man  
staggers down from his  
tractor cab.

His hat,  
lopsided  
on his head.  
Stubble on his face  
and red lines  
in his eyes  
mapping the miles  
he has put on this week.

He walks over to the door  
and opens it slightly,  
sees the unharvested fields,  
obstructed by a flurry  
of white.

He takes his hat off,  
rubbing his forehead  
working downward to the bridge  
of his nose,  
pinching it,  
closing his eyes

In hopes that  
when he opens them,  
the white will no longer  
be there.  
Then he can return  
to the tractor cab  
and complete his job.

But the snow remains  
the corn stands tall.  
He looks back at his tractors  
and shuts the light off,  
tucking them in for the night.

*Angie Kenobbie*



# Suds

Melissa Lovegren, fiction

Eva sat on the porch steps, a slice of red watermelon clutched in one grimy hand. Her jaws moved up and down, halting periodically when her lips formed an "ooo" to spit black seeds into the dust of the flower bed below. As she took a bite, the pink juice streamed in rivulets down her chin, dripping onto a once-white t-shirt. Wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, she watched her father bending in the heat of a late afternoon sun and scrubbing with a dripping, sudsy sponge at the glinting surface of the gray Oldsmobile. He had started at the back and now half of it gleamed wetly, the summertime grime cleansed away with water, a sponge and a capful of Mighty Mike's Marvelous Car Cleaner. Straightening and surveying his latest scrub, her father squinted, critical eyes searching for any hint of remaining filth. Bending down again he worked his way forward and then sprayed off the sliding suds with clear water from a long green hose. Cascades of hard spray streamed from the nozzle. It was the deluxe edition nozzle with a squeeze-handle, purchased at Shop-Rite for \$5.95.

"Looks like new Dad," Eva said through the pink juice which trickled out the side of her mouth, now dripping onto her arm and running down into the crease of her elbow.

"For today at least," he said, frowning at a few stray clouds wisping near the northern horizon.

Eva sucked the last of the juice from the rind and with a flick of her wrist aimed it

at the bushes of the neighboring empty lot.

As she stepped inside, her eyes took a moment to adjust to the dimness of the house. Her mother stood humming at the kitchen sink, hands immersed in cloudy water which was topped with tiredly drifting and deflated bubbles. They obviously did not "last and last!" like the singing woman with white teeth on the TV claimed. Eva flopped into a chair and slouched forward, her lolling head resting on an arm stretched out on the kitchen table.

"Get off the table, dear, you're filthy," her mother said without turning around. "Go wash up and change that shirt."

"You could smell dirt from a mile away, Mother," muttered Eva, rolling her head the other direction but not moving to rise.

"NOW, smarty pants," said her mother, turning her head to direct a pointed glare at Eva's stained and sticky face.

Eva let the warm water run for a full two minutes over her hands as she alternately splayed and clenched her fingers watching how the water streamed over, through and around, over, through and around.

"Don't let it run too long, Eva!" shouted her mom. "You're wasting all the hot water!"

Sighing and rolling her eyes, Eva splashed some water on her face and hurriedly cut the flow of water. After wiping her face with a towel, Eva stopped and stared at the face in the mirror. She saw a girl with a pink face that was bordered in a brown frame of dried juice and dust and who stared and then giggled back at Eva. Eva cupped her chin in her hands and put her elbows on the counter, grinning at the girl. It looked as if the shiny pink was painted on, the brown rim being the color of the girl's skin. The girl's eyes widened - it was Halloween paint. The girl was wearing a trick-or-treat mask!

Eva wrapped the edge of the towel around one finger and carefully rubbed at the edges of her face. Now the girl's mask had a jagged edge, a zig-zagging pink line.

Eva closed her eyes and imagined herself a character from her storybook land. Evastiltskin, her name would be. During

the day she wore a pink mask perfectly molded from the face of a small girl. She served the queen and her king in the royal court of the land of Sudsadia. Every day Evastiltskin would scrub the queen's bathing tub and made sure the water was "not too hot" and "not too cold." Evastiltskin knew just how much water the queen liked and she never wasted a drop. The king's shoes were to be blacked and polished once a week. Evastiltskin always rubbed and rubbed until the shoes shone like mirrors and her pink face peered up at her when she looked into them. When the sky began to darken Evastiltskin would carefully, oh so carefully creep into the kitchen where the big pots gleamed in the moonlight. The reflection on the pots showed gray fingers extending longer, longer, longer, curving as they stretched up to pull away the pink mask. Bit by bit a horrible goblin appeared, warted and smirking, eyes rolling about, searching for...

"Eva! What are you doing in there?" called the queen from the door of the kitchen.

The girl in the mirror jumped and quickly wiped on the rest of her pink mask, covering the peeping brown edges.



# Piggly-Wiggly

Donna Milkie, fiction

She's in front of me in the check-out line. She snaps her gum and shifts her great weight from one leg to the other. She scratches her ear with a chipping pink fingernail, trying to retrieve some earwax, I guess. Apparently she got some—she's examining the back of her fingernail. She's gross, but I can't stop watching. She sighs loudly. She picks a scab on her arm. I can't believe this woman—she's nasty and rude, talking to the cashier like her pantyhose are too tight and she's holding *him* personally responsible. She's claiming food poisoning from some Hellman's Real Mayonnaise she bought just last Tuesday. Her bridge club was none too pleased, let her assure you, they all got upset tummies and the you-know-what and they couldn't finish their bridge game.

The frightened cashier hurries off toward the back of the store. I watch the woman wipe her nose, then wipe *that* off onto Susan Dey's face on the cover of *People* magazine.

"God, I hate Susan Dey. She's a terrible actress. She was such a bitch on *L.A. Law*, and I can't stand her in *Love and War*. She should've left acting alone. She sure didn't move up in the world—from America's Most Popular Television Drama to some unknown sitcom. Even if she was a bitch, she should've stayed with *L.A. Law*. Why's everybody want a sitcom anyway? And who lets them have their sitcoms? All those overpaid, lazy-ass actors and their goddamn sitcoms. Oughta be a law."

*She's talking to me, I think. Oh, Lord.* But she never turns around. She just keeps talking that way right directly ahead, and there's no one there. The cashier has gone to ask the manager what to do about this woman and her you-know-what. I stand still, hoping she doesn't notice me. *If the manager has a sense of humor, I speculate,*

*he will offer to exchange the mayonnaise for a bottle of Pepto-Bismol in an even-up trade.* I laugh, but silently—I don't want her to turn around and attack me.

The wet-head cashier is coming back. The "Welcome to Piggly-Wiggly" video had not prepared him for this, but he's a-ok now; he spoke with the manager. In fact, here comes the manager now, all smooth-talking and apologetic. "We'll be glad to refund your money. Sorry about that. It

seems that we sold you a jar that had passed its expiration date."

"Oh, that's okay, honey, I'm sure it wasn't *your* fault." The woman has transformed into a sugar-coated, sweet-talking lady. So I watch while she and the manager out-do each other's charm. And I am certain that these two people never talk that way, except maybe to their mother-in-laws; God bless the women who watched their children marry those two sorry souls.

## Clown's Face

Today I view the world with a happy face . . .  
a clown's face.

I can not frown or cry or be anything  
but a clown, frozen in frivolity.

I hop, I skip, I jump . . . I smile,  
until my clown's face begins to dry  
and crack, and I with it.

My eyes are but blind floating orbs  
of anonymous color  
bobbing in a mask of white.

They cannot reveal my secrets  
because no one can see past  
my smile . . . my painted  
clown's smile.

But now, after hopping and skipping  
and jumping and sweating and . . .  
smiling, I am smudged.

My smile is distorted and all I want  
is to take off my face.

*Kellie Gregg, honorable mention*



# Flowers

Scott Isebrand, fiction

Jim walked ahead of the cluster of Japanese female college students. He was hurrying through the white board gates of the county fair and into the parking area to escape the stench of manure, the roar of the tractor pulls, and the eye-stinging smoke from the brat stand by the 4-H stall. County fairs. Dismal icons to Jim of his up-bringing in corn country. These students were being exposed to the most uncultured and bovine aspects of Iowa, those which gave the state its bad reputation.

From the students' snatches of Japanese broke against Jim's ears. He could decipher some of the high-pitched sounds. *Nahn-dah-loh*. Jim knew that one. It meant "What's the scoop?" or "What are you talking about?" He'd spent hours prepping for this tutoring job, and he believed he was trying hard to understand these peoples' language and culture. Which was why he was disappointed that his experiences with them had been less than profound.

He stopped to let them catch up a bit. He had, of course, out-paced them. They walked so slowly. When hurried, they didn't take bigger steps, they merely took more steps—*shuffleshuffleshuffleshuffle*.

They grew closer, he thought, like a cell, but sub-divided into talking and giggling pairs and threesomes of sub-cellular units—quietly energetic mitochondria. He had known before his tutoring duties began that all the students might be girls. He'd been made to read *The Journal of Teaching ESL*. There he learned that Japanese parents would not send their young girls, their budding flowers, to the pistol-infested cities they saw in subtitled versions of *Boyz in the Hood*. Send them to the Mid-west . . . where nothing ever happens.

One of the students, Keiko, he thought her name was, drew Jim's blank stare onto her smiling face. He waved at her, acknowledging her smile.

Jim started walking again, so to urge them to the van waiting fifty yards down the row of cars and trucks. Twenty-yards behind him, the girls. Twenty yards ahead of him, a half-dozen typical elderly farm couples, coming toward him, all eager to smell the blue-ribbon horse shit. The men wore the uniform of their trade: Pioneer green and yellow seedcorn caps, blue and white striped overalls, and dusty boots. Their purse-ready wives followed closely. The old farmers talked in hoarse grunts.

Jim and the old couples met. He gave them a nod. One seedcorn cap nodded and rumbled a quiet "Hey," in return. When Jim was two paces beyond them he heard one of the old farmers declare, "Jesus, Pete, we're being invaded!"

Triggered, Jim spun around on his heel. He was not surprised at the ignorant comment. Sure enough, one of the old farmers was pointing to the students. It was at moments like this that Jim was particularly aware that he was not cut from the same mold as the older generations of provincial Iowa good ol' boys.

After casting a natty gaze at the Japanese girls, the farmer walked on towards the gate, with all his friends—save one. The particularly tenacious-looking old farmer hesitated. He stared, from under the bill of his cap, with a hard gaze, like a bull's. He stood with his arms hung back and his legs bowed. A top-heavy figure-eight about to fall over forward, Jim thought.

As the students approached, the farmer waddled to intercept them. Jim trotted back, past the farmer, reaching the girls just before they met the old man.

Jim walked along with the students, his eyes on the farmer, hoping the farmer was getting the picture that this boy was in solidarity with these people. Jim hoped he was ready for anything the ignorant threw at him. Jim talked to Keiko, in front, "How are you tonight? Enjoy the fair?" Jim congratulated himself for enunciating very clearly.

"Yes," Keiko replied with a wide grin. She was the tallest student—taller than Jim, nearly six feet. She had the longest legs, yet to Jim even she seemed to shuffle. He shortened his stride to match hers. Keiko added, "I enjoyed very much. Very interesting."

Jim acknowledged Keiko's words with a slight smile, then, again, looked quickly up at the old farmer—still solidly positioned, anchored, where he had been moments ago. Jim took up a position opposite the farmer and let the students flow between them like a pattering brook. Some Jim greeted. "Hello. And hello to you. Hello, Midori. Have a good time? Hey, Shinko and Shihoko. How are you, Emi? Oh, not Emi. Masako, yes."

The students passed and the old man remained.

"Howdy," Jim fired.

"Are they from Japan?" The farmer

hobbled two slow steps toward Jim.

"Yeah." What's it to you, Jim thought.

The old farmer nodded and scratched his round chin with a dry beefy hand. He turned his gaze to the students. "I was in Tokyo in '46."

"Really?" Jim considered the possibility of paranoia of them,

"Yeah. Navy."

"Almost all our Japanese students are from Tokyo." Jim noted the ironic possibility that the farmer had once looked upon the shattered houses of these students' grandparents. And here Jim was with their grandchildren.

The man turned his gaze to Jim, "You from around here?"

Jim shifted on his feet. "I live in Iowa City." He added, trying to sound nonchalant, "My family roots are just outside the city, where my uncle does still farm." Jim didn't want to sound overly foreign, in order to confront this guy with the image of one of his own amongst the Japanese.

The old man grunted and rubbed his chin. He bobbed his head toward the students, "They all go to Western?"

"Yeah. Western College's Summer Session for Japanese Students. Some will go home. Some will stay, into the school year."

The old man resumed his stare at the students. Jim watched them, too, arriving at the van. Keiko stepped up to the latch of the side door and tested it. Locked.

"The women are pretty really, aren't they?" He suddenly asked Jim.

Jim was taken off guard. "Well . . . yeah, yes they are." Keiko was looking at Jim. She wanted him to know the van was locked. He wondered if she, in fact, looked annoyed. At him?

"They sure are," the farmer nodded. He seemed captivated. "Especially when they wear them kimonos. Lord, they are beautiful—the prettiest dresses in the world."

"Yes, the traditional outfits are beautiful. In the summer they wear traditional yukatas on special occasions," Jim responded, regurgitating data from a cultural handbook.

"I remember when we used to go down the streets of Tokyo and give the kids bubblegum." Jim's resistance wavered at this pronouncement. He wondered what the guy was getting at. Still looking at the students, in admiration it appeared, the farmer continued, "I'll never forget the evening we went to see traditional Japa-



nese dancing. All these women wearing kimonos with flowers designs on 'em—bright red and blue and yellow, gold and silver thread. And they'd dance real slow, carefully," the old man vaguely gestured, the ghost of a stylized movement dug from his memory. "It was like watching the most beautiful, slowly swayin' field of blossoms . . ."

Jim leaned forward, ever so slightly,

verifying that the man's gaze rippled with the soft wrinkles of a grin. The old man was moved; he had once been moved, awed even, somewhere half-way around the world, and now he seemed to be moved again, here.

"Well," Jim offered weakly, "have a good night, now." Jim waved.

And they parted. The man on toward

his friends at the gate, Jim toward the women and the van, at a slow jog.

At the van Keiko asked Jim, "What was that man saying to you?"

Jim sighed. Digging out the van key from his deep pocket and unlocking the door, he replied, "Flowers." Then, he repeated the word, to himself, "Flowers." And getting into the van he said it again.

## Anna and Me

*Susan Van Rees, honorable mention essay*

Yesterday, Sunday night at 11:54, I clicked on the answering machine. We hadn't talked for a year, yet I instantly recognized the voice—thin, worn—it was Anna.

I met Anna in the stark room of our high school American lit class. Our teacher was Mrs. Madeline Kelly, a tall sultry woman with long legs and shiny hazelnut hair. Always proper and honest, she often responded to our class of thirty-seven with a contorted face and a quizzical brow. The only two participants in class discussions, Anna and I were often the recipients of Mrs. Kelly's crooked expressions. Waves of heat would pass over my face as I dared overcome my fear of speech, and as we left class I could hear the intensity in Anna's clear voice and see the passion echoed in her flushed cheeks. Our friendship was inevitable.

A large crimson maple tree about 75 feet from the bustling high school was a haven for these two misfits. Its waving branches invited us, and its sturdy trunk supported us. It was a small world, a life of a dandelion in a field of roses. There Anna and I discussed Emerson and Thoreau, shared stories of our lives, and laughed at ourselves. With fingers tapping tight puzzled lips, we often attempted to answer questions about the nature of life and ourselves, eventually concluding with the clanging of the lunch bell and "I just don't know."

Apart from school, life presented many adventures. Anna and I heroically extinguished a fire in the park—although we

were vexed by the disbelief of a nearby neighbor who refused to call the fire department. We tromped through fields, illegally crossing fence after fence until unexpectedly confronted with seven bulls. One fall day, we raced through the icy waters of the river. Our excursion ended with steamy blankets wrapped tightly around each torso combatting our mild cases of hypothermia.

Yet it was many months before I was invited to Anna's home. When I finally arrived, I discovered why. I tramped up three cracked stairs which sunk a bit further into the earth with each step. I knocked at the rickety screen door with a vast hole where the screen should be. No answer. I eyed the peeling beige paint revealing the mint green preference of the previous owner. When I knocked again, I was greeted at the door by a chubby seven-year-old boy. Small clumps of dirt were immeshed in his hair and strawberry jelly was smudged about his mouth. He asked what I wanted and almost simultaneously screamed at his bellowing mom to shut up. Just as he began to clamor, a small shaggy lhasa apso scurried out the door barking; the boy raced after the dog, cursing profusely. I peered through the doorway in search of Anna's familiar fragile frame. Slowly, tentatively, she emerged from the kitchen, hands covering her eyes and face. She ran bony fingers through her thick dark hair stopping suddenly at the nape of her neck. "God, I'm sorry Sue. Welcome to my house..." She motioned about the room. I noticed the piles of crumpled magazines thrust about the room, cereal and cookie

crumbs scattered on the floor and soiled sweatshirts strewn across the arms of a gold velour chair. I smiled feebly. "Thanks."

When Anna moved from this home on Boston Avenue we were each alone—uncertain of life, the future, ourselves. We chose different paths; I left for college while Anna moved in with her dad and commuted to the Principal Insurance Company. Plans were made to keep in touch, but homework and insurance policies took time once given to long poetic letters.

Summer passed and soon Anna was also off to college. We met the evening before she departed for another school year. It had been so long neither knew quite what to say. We sat restless, silent. She returned changed after hard relationships. The deep black eyes reflected her painful acquisition of knowledge and wisdom, the masses of black hair, limp and lifeless, mirrored her spirit. We each sat reflecting on our year, our lives, our different paths... Suddenly she broke the silence: "We need an adventure." We decided to head for the field where we then pitched our tent, gathered wood, squirted lighter fluid and lit a match. The bonfire was ready. Anna and I read poetry and danced wildly about the fire occasionally pausing to breathe life into the fire with a large spurt of fluid...

Click. The voice on the answering machine stopped abruptly, and I sat waiting for more. It has been more than a year since we've seen each other, talked, or written.

I will call, I will see her, and we will connect again.



# Dates

Melissa Lovegren, fiction

He's popular, and guess what? her friends said. He likes you. Not me, she said. He asked her, would she like to go out? Yes, she said. They went. He kissed her, wet, slobbery, first kiss. How was it her friends asked? Hmmmmmmmm, alright, she said, wet, our lips didn't match, not like the movies.

Many dinners, many shows, many walks, more wet kisses. He told her he loved her. She whispered it back, hoping he would hear (I want to do this right, she thought), hoping he wouldn't, for honesty's sake.

He moved away. She breathed.

The tall one, he likes you, her friends said. He doesn't, he can't, she said. I hope so, she thought. Awkward looks, awkward hello's and finally, would you like to go out, he said. Yes, she said smoothing a grin

into a Mona Lisa. Two movies, some talk, one kiss.

He walked away. She watched him run, she watched him sing, she watched him glance away.

She moved away. I must start again, she said. And did.

He's an intellectual, her friends said. You would be great together. Do you really think so, she said.

They talked, talked and talked. They kissed (only natural, she thought) and talked some more. Us, we're amazing, she said, we talk.

He kept coming, coming, talking. I'm sorry, she said. I can't breathe. What? he said.

Bitter looks, bitter words, she walked

away, he shadowed. He needs time, said her friends, just give him time. She did. And then she waited — for the inevitable next.

He's talented, he's musical, and likes you, her friends said. I hope so, she said. They chatted, they kissed, too much. Her eyes chained his steps. I'm sorry, he said. I have to leave. I know, she said, but didn't.

She watched him talk, she watched him eat, she watched him walk, she watched him.

I can't do this, she said. She tried. She tried. And she didn't.

He's funny, her friends said. We know he likes you. Oh, she said. Go out? he said. Alright, she said. He held out his hand. She hesitated. And then she dragged out her own, inevitable, limp, distant, afraid.

# A Time of Cooling

Lori Ronken, fiction

It was that time between Summer and Autumn. The days were cooler, the leaves were not yet changing, and school had begun. Then, we ate meals together and shared our ideas and dreams in conversations that stretched late into the night. On whims, we abandoned our studies and went for dinner and a movie. We drove ludicrous numbers of miles for a few days away. How things got done, I am not sure. Drawing energy from each other, we finished the necessary and forgot the rest.

One day he burst through my door, hands behind his back. "I have a gift for you!" His expression was like a child's, and if it had been spring, I would have expected him to offer forth a dandelion for my happiness. "For you, Mademoiselle." He was now debonair, and on his palm lay a plump red berry that he had picked from the bush just outside my door. He had brought it for my smile. As I set it on my makeshift night stand, he told me that it had agreed to be free from the bush so that I could enjoy it inside.

Over Labor Day weekend, we escaped to the Black Hills. We left after classes Friday afternoon for Buffalo, South Dakota, 520 miles away. Our friends told us we

were crazy, and that we should spend our days off relaxing. You'll either fall asleep driving or sleep all day Sunday, they warned us.

Saturday morning we got up in time to see the sunrise at Mount Rushmore.

We rented a paddle boat at a park near our campground and explored Crystal pond. The sky was cloudless, and seeking relief from the sun, we chose to float underneath the branches of the weeping willows scalloping the west curve of the pond. Our conversation was circling around "remember when" statements.

"Remember that time we tried to ride our bikes as far as we could across Nine Mile Creek?" he asked with a laugh.

"Hah, yeah. I said there was no way would we get across. It had to be about four or five feet across where we were."

"But it was only about two feet deep in the middle."

"We made it about that far, too. And I would have been swept along by the current if—"

"You hadn't jumped off your bike right away. You're always getting swept away."

"Yeah, like when you came like a broom into my life. Or perhaps I should say tor-

nado."

"And now we're sitting in the eye?" he leaned over and kissed my cheek. I licked his face.

Sunday, we ate breakfast again at the foot of Mount Rushmore before hopping in the jeep for Custer State Park. We drove slowly through the park's winding roads; I flinched at every switch-back turn. Off to the left, I noticed a gravel road. Thinking that it may prove to be less treacherous, I suggested that we turn onto it as we might see something the average tourists did not. Eventually, the road was little more than two worn tracks in the grass. It led us through a pasture where Buffalo grazed lazily. We stopped and spent an hour or so photographing the solid beasts, whose eyes followed us intensely.

Monday we packed up our site and headed back.

In mid-September, we had planned to have my birthday dinner at Taxxi, a nice, but reasonable American bistro downtown. When he came over before lunch, I gave him a quizzical look. In reply he said, "Let's not go. Let's do something."

"But what about . . ."

"The reservations? I've cancelled them."



"My homework."

"You can do it later. Today, you need to have fun."

I grabbed my jacket from the closet.

Heading east on I-494, I asked where we were going. He flashed his, "wouldn't you like to know" smile at me. Knowing he'd never say, I leaned my head back. When I woke up I recognized an old brick pottery factory turned outlet mall on the left. "Red Wing," I half asked, half stated.

At the end of Main Street, Barn's Bluff rises abruptly as if it had been dropped there after the town was built. Its top is a grassy plain that slopes off to the west. Its east side slopes and drops into the Mississippi River. That day, Barn's Bluff seemed to shine from the sun hitting the tree's autumn colors. At that moment, I was more satisfied than any dinner could have made me.

We hiked around the bluff on gold strewn paths. At one point we paused and looked down at the Mississippi.

"Isn't it amazing that—"

"This bluff doesn't crumble into the river?"

"No—amazing that we've never taken a hot air balloon ride."

He feigned a shove.

We continued along the east side and then went up what seemed like 300 stairs. Each stair had been made possible by donations; some of the names that had been engraved on the riser of each were eroded.

Reading those we could, we climbed to the top.

After eating a simple picnic lunch he had brought, we stretched out on the blanket under the sun and watched the birds dip and soar on the wind currents.

"What are you thinking?" I asked softly after awhile.

"Life. I hope I never get so busy that I don't do things like this. You know, the joy of being."

When we got back to school we realized that maintaining that enjoyment of being could be difficult. Knowing the nature of school schedules, we reserved an hour each day to be together. Before long I asked to change the time; I had to meet with team members on a psychology project. Eventually we simply tried to eat dinner together. Dinner was bumped to lunch when he became a waiter at Perkins. I worked in the campus bookstore and both of us were involved in campus organizations. Add in studying, and our time was filled. Now when we ate together, it was planned a week in advance.

A few days before midterm break, at the intensity of my studying, he phoned.

"Hey, it seems like forever, doesn't it?"

"Hey you. How've you been?"

"I'm okay—busy. How 'bout yourself?"

"You know, busy, tired, but I'm hanging in there."

"What do you think about going to Marie C's for pie?"

"Now?" Marie's was 40 minutes away. Less than a month ago, I would have gone in an instant.

"Yeah. I called, they have Boston Cream."

I groaned. "It's so tempting . . ."

"BUT? There's got to be a but. What's yours?"

"I've got so much—"

"To do." He finished. I had forgotten he did that. I didn't much feel like that game now, though.

"Yes, to do." I sighed. "Listen, I want to, but . . ."

"Yeah, I should probably do some things, too."

"Listen, if I change my mind . . . I'll call ya."

"Yeah. Hey, good luck on your tests."

I hung up the phone and glanced at the clock on the night stand. 9:23. I had enough time to finish my calculus assignment and get a strong start on my sociology reading. My eyes lingered on the night stand and traveled across to where the berry still laid. The stem looked as brittle as the dry old leaves covering the lawn. The berry's bright color had drained, and was now a deep, almost black, red. It was puckered, as though its center had tried to suck life through its skin. It had succeeded only in sucking itself closer, tighter to itself.

## Holding On

*Karen Van Gorp, fiction*

Children love recess during a long school day. It's their favorite time of the day. Little girls play house quietly, while the boys play rough and tumble games like kill soccer or bang 'em up basketball. It was always this way—boys playing on the grassy field and girls keeping house by the school.

The boys would not tolerate or understand a slower child. The games were a serious matter with bragging rights. Yet, the boys allowed one girl to play with them. She was a different girl from the others. She could throw a ball with zip just like a boy. If a ball hit her in the face, she didn't whimper. She was tough like the rest of the boys, who handled the occasional

bruises or bloody noses.

It was almost the end of recess. Last bat for the team in the dugout. The game was tied. Two outs with the winning run on third base. The girl was up. Her team was excited. She's a real slugger, the pitcher muttered worriedly to his team. She swung at the first pitch. But missed. The second ball came across the plate—fouled into the sheep pasture. As the pitcher threw the next ball, the girl swung the bat with all her might.

The ball sailed into the left field. It went far—in the right direction. But the bat went the wrong way into the catcher's face. Blood spurted from his nose. The catcher cried. Boys don't cry unless they are really

in pain. The catcher hurt. So did the girl.

The boys thought the girl was mean. "Did you see what she did?" They whispered. The teacher told the children it was an accident. But the whispers continued.

The girl cried too. She felt so bad. The boys saw her. Girls who cry can't play softball with boys.

But she was caught in between...she had always played with the boys. Plus, the other girls were a little anxious about her. "She hurt a boy," they murmured with awe in their little play housekeeping groups. If only I had held onto the bat a few seconds longer, she wished. Yet, holding on would not have made a difference, as all little girls grow older.



# What the Boys Did with the Mail

Scott Isebrand, fiction

The dirty apartments were small and boring, so the boys liked to play outside. They usually played Star Wars or war. Rarely, with some girls, they'd play school in the grassy courtyard in the middle of the apartment units. The younger boys had to be students, but older boys could be gym teachers and science teachers married to the nurse or reading teacher.

Occasionally, the boys climbed into the walled-in garbage lot—like a room with no roof and walls which were smeared with grime. They would explore the contents of the four dumpsters, or sit among the dumpsters' green and smelly hulks and talk and lie about what their fathers did for a living.

"My father is a colonel. He flies these," said the oldest boy, pointing to a jet fighter pictured in a book salvaged from a dumpster. The youngest boy nodded.

Next to the garbage lot there was a large sandbox. But middle school bullies would bother them there, and the oldest boy would try to be like the middle schoolers and pick on the younger boys. Also, the dogs used the sandbox to go to the bathroom in.

One day the boys decided they'd steal people's mail. The oldest boy really liked the plan and led the others to the shaded corner of an apartment duplex. As everyone peered around the corner, he whispered and pointed to the black mailboxes all in a row along the curb.

"I'll go with you to the mailboxes," said the youngest boy. The oldest boy scowled briefly. But, eventually, the two boys stepped out from the shadowed corner of the apartment building. They walked through the forty feet of open, hot, and sunny backyards, relieved that no adults noticed them from backyard sliding screen doors.

The two boys arrived at the boxes, walked past a dozen of them, then nonchalantly opened a box each and pulled the mail out, putting it under their shirts and hastening back to the other boys.

All the boys huddled together. The oldest boy said he wanted to burn the mail. One of the younger boys, the one with the

dirty white T-shirt, wanted to drop it all and move on. He said he was spied taking a lawn ornament once, and later a policeman came to his house and scolded him right there in front of his parents.

Suddenly, the youngest boy said they should hide it under one of the flat white rocks of the short landscaping wall just behind them. It ran under the edge of a sidewalk, and they'd been told it kept the soil from washing away. The oldest boy liked this hiding place for the mail. The youngest boy said nothing. The boys hid the mail under some of the rocks and left to the sandbox.

Later, towards the very end of the afternoon, the youngest boy, who never liked the sandbox, especially today, left the others and pretended to go inside.

Actually, he went back to the rock wall. He carefully pulled out all the dusty mail. Looking around, he strode briskly across the backyards, arrived at the row of mailboxes, and frantically shoved all the mail into a couple of boxes. Then he hurried away.

He hoped no one saw him. And he hoped that if he put the wrong mail in the wrong boxes the adults would sort it all out.

## Peace

I sit  
in the comfortable  
bed of leaves  
along the emerald banks  
of the winding river.

Water flows smoothly  
and quietly,  
carrying with it  
delicate treasures of gold  
fallen from the sky.

The oak trees whisper  
to one another  
above me,  
clouds glide through the air.  
The warm sun  
rests its weight upon me,  
as I drift off to sleep.

Angie Kenobbie



# Mimosa

Stephanie Fogelberg, fiction

The girls had conquered all of the maples and oaks in the neighborhood. Those trees that lined the street were straight and tall. Each of them stretching at least ninety feet into the sky. But the girls were expert tree climbers. Better than most of the boys around. They scaled the thick trunks, gripped and pulled themselves onto the accessible branches. They navigated paths among the limbs and peeked out at the world below through the gaps in the green and silver leaves of the maples and the bristly blades covering the oaks. They continued to the very tops, dar-

ing each other onto the thinnest branches—feeling the exhilaration of reaching the top.

Until this day, only one tree was left untouched. The tree in the front yard was hardly a challenge. They hoisted themselves onto the lowest branches. Only three feet off the ground. The sturdy mimosa tree held their small frames gently. The two girls stayed nestled there in the sunshine all afternoon, thoughtful of the tree's secret. They liked to see how close they could get their fingers before the leaves shut tightly. They caressed them with their fingers, their toes, their noses. They wondered

why the leaves closed. Maybe the leaves were ticklish. Or did it hurt them to be touched?

The girls continued to explore the civilized wilderness around them, but they came back often to this strong, gentle friend. This was the spot they chose when they wanted to be alone. And the leaves of the mimosa tree acted as their "Do Not Disturb" sign.

## *A Carthusian's Daily Discipline of Rebirth*

Quivering in resolute tension  
at the threshold  
of The Cosmic Rent—His Tear of Flesh,  
finally,  
acquiesce.

Haltingly  
hailing the necessity of  
surrender  
to the insatiable tides of His Blood  
beckoning beyond His Body,

drop finally,  
fetal,  
a kneeling infant,  
into the surge—  
thick-running red  
like lava racing through broken bedrock  
or under cracked surface crust—  
the river  
with source unknown,

and be absorbed,

engulfed, by this  
flowing, ambionic, fire-fluid devourved.

Scott Isebrand



# The Explorer

Stephanie Fogelberg, fiction

She wasn't a tomboy, but sometimes she tried to be. She wore her brother's hand-me-down sweatshirts and Levi's. Tagged along with his friends—when they belched, she squeaked, they told dirty jokes, she laughed—but her eyes told them, "I don't get it!" She mostly just annoyed them. She climbed the same trees (they weren't very tall), got the same bruises (though many more than her brother) and the same lectures from their parents about being "civilized human beings." When she grew up she would be a construction worker or a doctor.

On their little farm, she was the only girl. She was the only one for miles. When none of her brother's friends could come around, she was a suitable companion for him. They tried to build a tree fort in the grove, though she wasn't much help. Mom yelled, "Come out of there, the bugs'll eat you alive." They headed down to the garage to play "mechanic"—she would be the helper—mom called, "Don't bother your grandfather, he's working on the tractor!" They decided to ride their bikes down to the creek.

She hopped on her battered yellow bicycle and rotated the grips on the handlebars—revving up the engine. She yelled, "Who am I?" as they began to speed down the dusty gravel road and she warbled "I want a devil in skin tight leather. He's gonna be wild as the wind. And one fine night, I'll be holdin' on tight to a cool rider, a cool rider."

He smirked at her and guessed, "Smurfette?"

"No, Michelle Pfeifer in 'Grease II'! When they make 'Grease III,' I'm gonna be the star—just like Michelle!"

"Oh yeah, first you have to be able to sing!" he shouted as he raced down the narrow lane.

The creek ran a quarter of a mile away from the house. It was clear and ran very slowly on one side of the road and gained momentum somewhere under the bridge. They stood on the bridge—he threw pebbles into the quick current, she watched the water creep under the bridge on the other

side. She peered past the water and studied the shifting sand. Her brother went down under the bridge and found little shells that looked like tiny oysters. He called to her "What are you waiting for? Come down here, it's cool." She was afraid that if a car drove over the bridge it would collapse, but she didn't say anything—she didn't want him to remember she was just a girl. She went under the bridge too. They searched for a long time, coming up with many shells. The shells would be very useful. That's what they would tell their mother when she insisted that they didn't need any more junk to clutter up the house.

Having collected all of the shells within their reach, they walked around feeling the gritty sand, and in some places smooth, black mud, smooch between their toes. She told him a story about two little children who were playing in the creek.

"These children were getting kinda bored until the farmer let his horses out into the pasture, and the children went to see them. And the horses started talking to them and asked them if they wanted to go for a ride. So they climbed on and rode around the pasture until they weren't in the pasture anymore—they were in a field near a castle. And when they went inside the castle, they saw pictures of themselves on the walls. And everyone was surprised and happy to see them because they were the prince and princess of the castle and they had been gone for a long time. So to celebrate, they had a big party to honor the prince and princess."

"That's a neat story," he said. "You should write it down."

They wished the story was true, but they decided that their lives were good enough. The day was hot, the water cool and no one knew where they were. But they had to get back before they were missed.

They stood on the larger rocks to clean off their feet before slipping them back into their Nikes—his blue and hers pink and purple. The sand came right off, but a clump stuck to her right foot. It just wouldn't come off. She asked her brother, "What is it, tar?"

"Come back up on the bridge and wait while I run home to get some salt. You got a leech on you." A leech?! She knew she was going to die—her heart seemed to tick the minutes away as she waited for her brother to return. She imagined that she

could feel the blood slowly draining from her body. She sat motionless wondering how long it takes for someone to bleed to death and how much trouble she'd be in if her mother found out.

What if it wasn't an ordinary leech? Maybe soon it would be able to crawl under her skin and swim through her veins all the way to her heart and then they'd never be able to get it out and it would get bigger and bigger until it filled up the whole inside of her heart and she'd die because her heart couldn't beat anymore! Or what if this kind of leech *liked* salt and when her brother came back and he put the salt on it, maybe it would become two and then four leeches and it would keep multiplying until they covered her whole body and...

Her brother finally appeared and after he convinced her that this was an ordinary leech (because he was an expert on the subject) he dumped half the contents of the container on her foot and the salt killed the leech as he had promised. The slimy creature lay shriveling on the gravel of the bridge while they hurried home to replace the salt shaker. Their shells lay in a pile below the bridge, forgotten. They never told anyone about the leech—because she swore she would die of embarrassment. And she didn't try as hard to be a tomboy after that.

When she grew up she'd be a singer or an actress—or a writer.



# The Other Bird

Kevin Bullis, honorable mention fiction

**S**tark tree branches answer the call of the wind by scraping gray skies. The boy huddles down the street, shivering damp in flannel. He hears the scuffle of wings tearing the air and looks up into the branches crowded with chattering birds. Admires the sweep of a raven slipping out of the tree and off against the gray sky.

The wind gusts and snaps a screen door shut with the report of a twenty-two. The boy snaps his eyes down with it. Sullen. Head dropped between his shoulders.

He is wandering along the gutter. Scrapes away dead damp leaves with his hard rubber soles. Kicks at the decaying stuff, scattering it in the air in temporary flight.

Hears a shuffling. Close by, in the gutter. A bird is there, flopping, dying. Working away from under the leaves the boy just kicked up.

The boy sits down on the curb, his gloved hands tucked under his arms. His head is pushed out forward, watching. He tries to breathe along with the bird. Short, quick. Excited. He shifts his legs to push the wind around the bird.

The bird lies still and watches.

The boy kneels in the mud. Hunches over the bird. Tentative, eyes locked on a single black eye turned up at him. Slowly he scrapes his hands along the leaves toward the bird.

Then quickly he catches it up. Clutches

it, carefully, like an egg for his mother's cake, and whisks it around toward the house. He holds the wings in, the bird scratching. It bites the thumb of the glove.

He holds the bird, arms locked stiff out in front. Works over the lawn, studying the ground out beyond the bird.

A boy runs at him, calls, "What's that?" Swings a Daisy rifle with his excited gait.

The wind gusts, scratching the sky.

The boy keeps his eyes steady, quickens his step. He pulls the bird up to his body.

## Teen Missions International in Papua New Guinea

I remember American hieroglyphics etched into the split and peeling wood of the plywood table.

I remember breakfast at 6 and dinner at 1 and supper at 5:30 exact, every day except Sunday.

I remember the feel of rain hitting the tin roof of the shed I slept in and the temperature dropping enough for a sheet to be necessary.

I remember singing songs from *Les Miserables* in line for the decrepit outhouse with the rotting wooden floor, and the bees that lived there during the day; only leaving when the spiders started their nightly vigil.

I remember native babies carried in sashes, and the black-haired children crying as we left them behind in our motor-powered canoe.

Krista Willis, honorable mention

## Hauna Village, Papua New Guinea

Palm trees laugh in the dancing rain, a village woman carries a bundle of pineapple from the hillside farm in a netted bag slung around her head.

On the construction site of the 3rd world hospital a native four year old walks with a machete in his left hand, while trying to balance with his crippled right.

Metal clangs and the smell of bread wafts around the hill dwelling hut where 20th century American teens exist in the happy ignorance they've always been taught.

Krista Willis



# Mademoiselle

Kevin Bullis, honorable mention fiction

This man, his eyes seem to flit and gaze. Pulled everywhere. Sizing up as he stands, one foot on the front seat of his black Camry, an arm draped over the door.

He ducks down and reaches into the back seat. Pulls out a black and red nylon camera case. He shuffles around inside and pulls out what looks like a Pentax fixed with a wide angle lens.

He criss-crosses the straps from the camera and the case over his shoulders. Strikes out on the path to the beach pushing the case behind him.

\* \* \*

I see her reclined on a blanket draped over the sand. She wears a light dress which whips in the cold wet wind. The sun shines brilliantly, blazing her full flowing hair.

She is made of lines pulled out, just touching together. Touching smoothly. Aesthetically. Like the lines of cirrus clouds whipped by a strong wind.

She lays half curled up on a side, head propped up over a book. A Coke can sits, repines in a bay carved by her figure.

I am sitting among rocks down the beach and inland from her. I cannot see her

face. Time passes and she is perfectly still. A statue as I study her and grow curious. Who is she, what does she think of? What is her story?

As I ponder she begins to move. Comes alive. She is reading, not a book, but a magazine. Which magazine? *People*? Certainly not *The New Yorker*. Not *L'Express*. Perhaps that one—*Cosmopolitan*. No. *Vanity Fair* is closer. That other French name, that works best. *Mademoiselle*.

Why is she here? Why alone? She looks off into the distance. What does she see? An approaching lover? Does she watch as some figure moves along the beach, enthralling? Intriguing.

She thinks of a lost love. A time they used to come to this very spot and read together all day. At night they would huddle together under the stars, their faces flashing in the warm light of a fire.

My heart becomes heavy as I wonder at her pain. A group of gulls ecstatics into flight. I follow them with my eyes and become her pain. I am her lover, dead. Waiting.

My mind drifts with the gulls and paints

a picture of pain. And of hope. She will find another. The sun sets now on the water. It will rise on renewed joy. But how? I must think.

My eyes follow along the edge of the water back towards her and intercept a figure stalled. Facing her, attached to his face a 35mm mounted telescopic lens. He lowers the camera and swings the case around to change film and fix another lens.

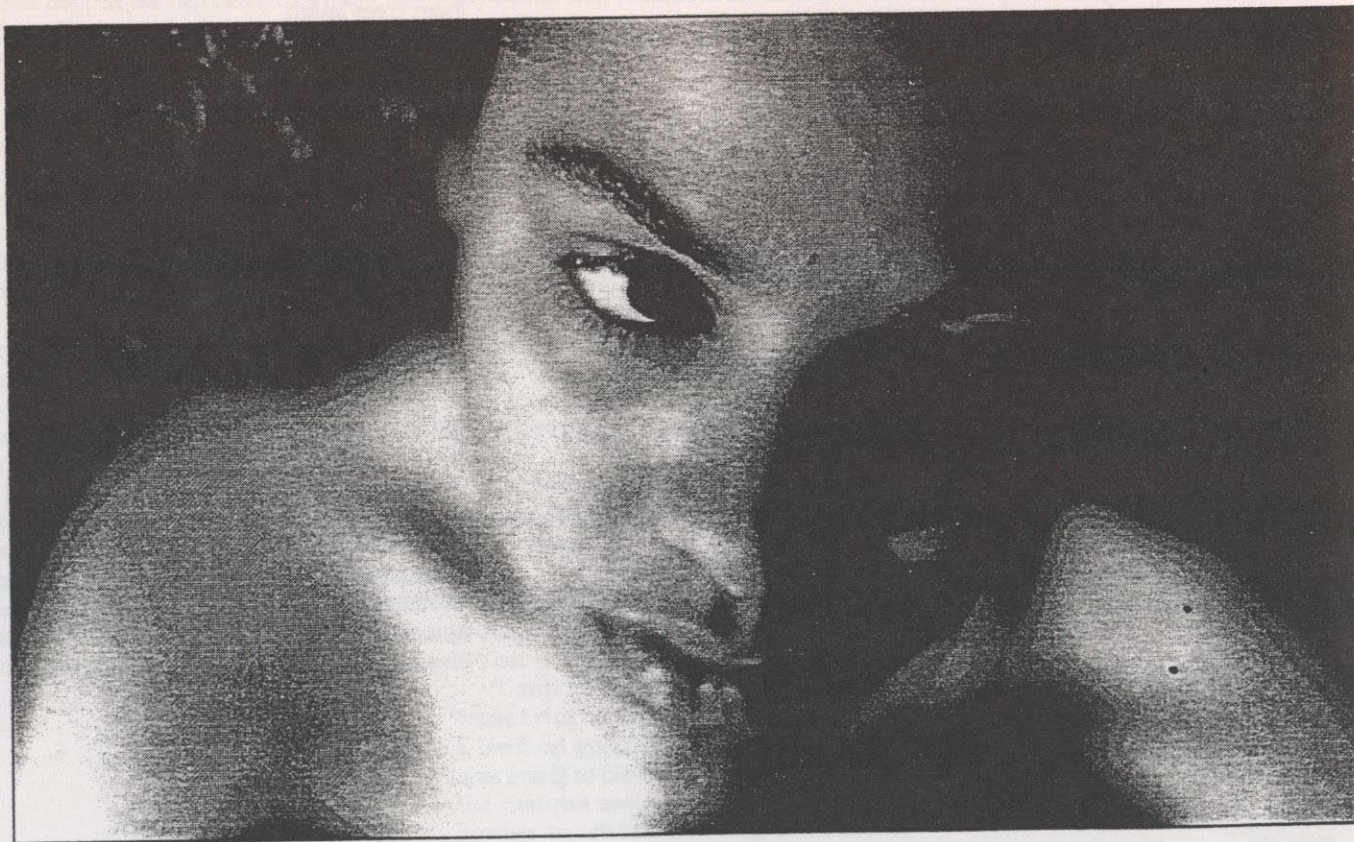
He moves toward her, crouching and moving, like a Marine on a beach head. Shooting with his camera.

He calls out and proffers a hand. Probably holds out a card. She reads the card and stands up quickly. He motions and she lies back down, looks back at him. He nods and moves around. He points and she obediently changes position.

He bends down and pulls the magazine off to the side. I get up and turn back toward the car.

She runs off with the cameraman. Sleeps with him, becomes a model. Forgets her lover. Forgets the beach.

The gulls circle back and land, huddled together in the cold.





# Hegira

Kevin Bullis, fiction

Stephen Sado lives in a second story apartment. At night he sleeps through gunshots, screams. Wailing. He is a state defense attorney. He lives in his clients' neighborhood.

The people he works for carry themselves as though their worn brown rags fell on them. Their bodies are slouched, still not recovered from the impact. The faces blend together, he sees only one—gray, unshaven, reeking of Jack Daniel's.

He trudges up the hallway. It is 5:25. He has just escaped the courtroom. Finally he reaches his door and works open the locks. The door opens with the hiss of a vault.

He enters his refuge. Removes his shoes and orders them by the door. The room is well lit after the darkness of the hall. Light floods through the window, the dark curtains pulled back.

The carpet is worn in. A path leads from the door to the kitchen, the bathroom, the bedroom and the living room. Potpourri carpet powder clings to the air. The living room holds a pale green couch with fraying cushions. A nineteen-inch Zenith is perched on a metal TV stand. Three prints with identical frames are hung squarely on the walls.

There is no desk in the apartment. He slips his briefcase into the closet.

Stephen takes the path to the kitchen. He warms up some soup. Dips a chunk of whole wheat bread into the broth and tears off the soaked piece with his lips. When he is finished he wipes the table clean, hangs up the dishcloth and stacks the rinsed bowl and glass in the cupboard.

In the bathroom, he scrubs his hands and face. He stares at the mirror. Close, his hands supporting him on the sink. His eyes are bloodshot. Dull. He allows a sigh. Then runs a wet comb through his hair, adjusts his tie.

He buffs his shoes in the bedroom. Slips a small packet from a box in the underwear drawer.

Stephen takes a deep breath before leaving. He pauses with his hand on the door knob, half turns to the living room. Then turns the knob and pulls himself through.

He carefully turns all the locks before turning for the back stairwell. His shoes click on the steps and echo. He moves quickly. Decisive.

He emerges in an alley and crunches into a shattered bottle. Curses under his breath

and wipes his shoe off on some old newspaper. Then begins working into the alley past open dumpsters of household rot and flies.

He sees her leaning in a metal doorframe. Her cigarette flares in the dusk. She exhales and is shrouded with smoke. She makes no move towards him, just waits. Staring at him.

He steps up to her, his eyes looking past into the dull light of the hall. She will not move aside. Forces him to look at her, in the face. Sneers at his reluctance. Then turns and takes him inside.

He holds back, at first, then allows himself to be taken. His face is full of blood under the red light of the exit sign.

## At the Concert Hall

I want to be that musical man  
at the baby grand, caressing  
the ivory keys  
with my fingertips  
until I become  
a part of the piano  
myself, the throbbing  
of notes one  
with the throbbing  
pulse in my heart,  
the feel on my fingertips  
nothing but keys.  
I want to learn  
in my bones  
how a melody can be  
more truth than fantasy—  
the simple tinkling fantasy  
where I have quarter notes  
on my wrists for bracelets,  
my fingers and the keys  
fused together  
in a cadenza  
of our own allegretto composition.  
I want to be more  
than an audience  
more than whole notes,  
for this is not simply  
*Ebony and Ivory*  
living together in perfect harmony  
but a way of performing,  
of performing the rippling  
overture, fingers reaching  
deeper and deeper  
into the soul.

Kellie Gregg, honorable mention



# Forecasting

Lori Ronken, fiction

What is it about you? I thought as I sat on the wooden seat of the swing. I turned toward her as if seeing her again would make things clear. What makes you talk so much about crazy things? She stood in the doorway looking across the yard at me. And what makes you so mute? My mother had been inside, being first crazy and then mute and then crazy again, a lot lately. Sometimes within the same hour. Nobody could figure out why.

That's why I came outside, to the swing in the front yard. I needed time to think, to figure out why. I love the breeze on my skin and in my hair—blowing it forward and back as I swing backward and forward, pumping myself higher and higher. I've wondered if it would be possible to swing high and fast enough to go up and over the branch in a big circle. I paused, coasting on the momentum I'd gained. She'd come outside, and was now standing by the tree. Did she want to talk? Was she going to be normal? Dragging my feet, I slowed down. What is it about you? I turned to her.

She swooped down and wrapped me in arms that had once held me as a baby. She smelled sweet, of talcum powder and perfume. It made me sick. Once I had used some of her powder after my bath. The container had slipped out of my hands and poofed all over the bathroom floor. I cleaned most of it up, but when I took the rug to the porch to shake it out, she was there. At first, she didn't say anything, she just watched while I struggled to snap the powder from the heavy rug into the air.

"The weatherman said it would be partly cloudy today," she had said. "It's kinda hazy, don't you think? Hazy, daisy, lazy, it's so paisley. Why am I wearing this checkered dress? Let's have a picnic." She had continued until I thought she'd never stop, "It's Sunday, and I need to pi—" Then, she had closed her mouth. The only time she opened it again that day was to eat. When she snapped out of it, she apologized, like always, for not being herself—as if there were only one. Maybe she meant she was sorry for not being who she thought she should be.

Now she was apologizing again. "Honey," she said, "I'm sorry I haven't been myself lately." I let her hold me a short while before I recoiled from her smell, her embrace. Sitting on the swing, I watched

her as she spoke. Her long wavy hair hung limply around her face and draped over her shoulders. "It's nice out today, isn't it?" We both looked at the sky. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her look back at me. Acting like I didn't notice, I continued to look at the sky. She proceeded slowly, "it's been a while since we've sat down together, hasn't it honey?"

I nodded. What did she want to say? I turned toward her.

"What are the new neighbors like?"

"They're all right. The five-year-old is kinda a pain, but they have a girl my age who's nice. The parents are okay too."

"What do they do?"

"The parents?"

She nodded.

"Oh, I'm not sure. The mom is home a lot, and the dad works at a bank in town. He comes home for lunch a lot, I think."

"Mmmmm. Do you want to walk for a while?"

"Sure." She headed towards the back yard. I knew she would; she loved the woods behind our house as much as I did. One morning, about two weeks ago, she had gone for a walk. When she didn't come back for lunch, my aunt had made me look for her. I found her in the woods sitting beside a path hugging her knees, her long hair was snarled with leaves. She hadn't heard me so I backed up and called for her from a distance.

Before I knew it she was in front me. "Sweetie, sweetie, what do you need?" Her eyes were red, and eyeliner was smeared beneath her eyes.

"I, uh, well we were gonna eat lunch. Do you want some?"

"Yes, I'm famished! Race you to the house!" Her happiness sounded forced, but I ran for the back door anyway.

Inside, my aunt asked her where she had been. She just shrugged and said she had been walking in the woods, gotten tired and rested for a while.

She hadn't gone to the woods since then.

As we entered the leafy canopy, I wondered what her thoughts were.

"Do you like it here?" she asked.

"I love these woods."

"No, I mean living here with your auntie and I?"

"Yeah." I didn't know how she was. I half expected her to start talking about feathers on trees and what would happen if birds had branches. But something about

her made me think she wasn't being crazy this time.

We walked in silence for a while.

"I do love it here, especially in the fall," I said. "When the leaves change color, everything is so pretty. It's pretty now, of course, it's just that the fall is so different. The only things I don't like about fall are raking and starting school again."

"Last year, on the first day of school, my teacher made the class write stories about what they did during the summer. Then we had to read them out loud. A lot of kids said they went on vacation, but I wrote about spending time in the woods. A few of them laughed, not real loud or anything, just a little snicker, but I heard them. But it didn't matter though, cause I thought their summers sounded dumb."

"Honey, I think I might have to move."

"What?"

"I think I'm going to move."

"Where are we moving to?"

"Well, all of us wouldn't move. Just me."

My mouth went dry.

"My doctors think that it would be best if I spent some time in a group home. Some place with supervision. They don't think that I should be alone."

What about Auntie and I? We're here.

"I can't stay here. Aunt June has other things to do, and, come fall, you'll have school. Besides, they think I need professional care."

"I think it's for the best, honey." Her voice was soft and resigned. "I lose things, I get lost in familiar places. I lose myself and I don't know what to do." I could hardly hear her now. "I get so scared. Yeah, it would be best."

I wished she had speculated about feathers on trees and branches on birds. But she hadn't. She was moving. Parents weren't supposed to move away. The dark, coolness of the woods was too dark, too cool. How could losing a mother be for the best? I looked at my watch. "It's almost time for lunch, mom."

"Well, let's go see what Aunt June has for us."

When we came out of the woods, the sun was concealed behind the clouds. "Race you to the house," my mom said. "Ready? Set? Go!"

We tied, and paused panting at the door. She kissed the top of my head.

I walked into the house ahead of her.



# The Father

Kevin Bullis, fiction

Ryan pumped hard up the hill on his mountain bike. The front tire was going flat and pulled the bike down hard against the road.

It was about supper-time. Cars filled the driveways and toys lay where kids left them on the front lawns. The rim was starting to run on the ground, so Ryan got off to save the tube. He pushed the bike along in the gutter while he walked on the curb. He wove up the street, ducking off the curb to avoid mailboxes, pulling the bike close to get beside parked cars.

He came to an open garage. A man was wheeled under the engine of an old Ford. A boy was in the driveway pumping up the tire on his BMX.

The man called from under the car, "You got to take care of that bike. Your mother and I didn't spend good money on that bike to have you throwing it around like some toy. A bike is for transportation, for getting from point 'A' to point 'B.'"

The boy said, "You oughtta be able to have some fun." But he said it so the man couldn't hear.

Ryan asked, "Can I borrow that pump a minute?"

"Who's that?"

"He wants to borrow the pump" said the boy.

The man clanged a wrench onto the concrete and wheeled himself out. "What's the problem?"

"I got a leak. If I can pump it up it should last me til I get home."

"Let's take a look at it."

"I'm sure it'll be all right, I'll just pump it real quick and bike home."

"Well, all right. Here, we'll just get it out real quick. See how bad it is. Son, get me a screw driver and a half-inch. And a vice-grips."

The boy disappeared behind the Ford.

"So, how did this happen?" the man asked as he crouched around the bike. "You want to hold that steady?"

Ryan held it tight. "I was trying out a new trail." The boy returned. "Ran into a patch of weeds. I must have hit some stick-ers."

"Where were you headed?"

"Oh, I was just out enjoying the day. We haven't had weather..."

"See son, you got to use a bike right. You go running off into the hills, you'll find yourself wheeling your bike around instead of riding it. Like our young fella here."

He had the tire off and was slipping the tube out. "Look at that, you got stickers all over the thing, this is gonna take a fortune in patches."

"I've got a new tube at home. Here, thanks. Let's just put it back on, I'll wheel it back." Ryan moved to the wheel and started stuffing the tube back in.

"Hey look, we've got it out, let's just do it up now." The man pulled the wheel away and spun into the garage. We'll clean it up and find all the holes." Passing the door into the house, he called, "Hey, honey, why don't you bring us out a couple of beers. I got a guy out here who wants me to fix his bike. It's going to take a little while." Turning to Ryan, "Do you want a beer?"

"Um, no thanks. Look, I need to get going. I appreciate this and all, but it's about time I got back. I've got a meeting."

"Hey, do you want this thing fixed or not? Come on," his wife came out of the house with two beers, "take your beer and I'll get this thing ready for you. Don't worry about the cost. I got to teach this boy responsibility. Do unto others, you know. Ethics."

He tossed Ryan a beer and looked down at the one in his hand, "What's this generic crap? You ought to know I hate it."

Sue came to the screen door. She looked surprised. "You told me. . ."

"Yeah, well," he looked back at the beer in disgust, popped it open and took a sip, "It's not even cold."

Then, remembering Ryan, he said "Women." and faced his back to his wife. "We got to find that repair kit." He rummaged through some shelves and turned to his son. "What did you do with that kit?"

The boy said he didn't do anything with it. Ryan spoke up, "I've got the stuff I need. I just wanted some air to get me home." The man moved to speak. "That's okay, I didn't know the tire was that bad. I just live a couple of blocks down. I'll go now."

Sue called from the house, "Supper's just about ready."

The man looked away from Ryan, "It's about time."

Then back, "Well, you got to take better

care of that bike."

"Of course." Ryan gathered the wheel and pulled the frame of the bike over his shoulder.

"You just gonna leave them bolts on my driveway?"

"Um, no. Sorry." Ryan bent over and almost lost the bike.

The man turned to his son. "Get inside."

Ryan was moving out of the driveway, aimed across the street.

"Hey, what do you think your doing. Get your ass back here."

Ryan froze.

"Get your ass back here. No man talks like that to me in front of the kid. He's got to respect his old man, and I'm not going to have some whiny piss-head who treats his bike like shit demeaning me right there in front of him. Come here. Do you hear me? No man."

Ryan did not come. He kept his bike between himself and the man. He did not move away. He fled into himself.

"Gah dammit!" The man smashed the half-full beer can in his hands. For a second he looked ready to charge.

"Honey, what's going on out there?"

The man turned his ear to the sound of his wife's voice and was held there, as if between two ropes in tug o' war.

Ryan opened his mouth.

"No, don't say anything. Get out of here."

Ryan disappeared, flailing with bike down the street.

The man looked down at the can and the beer spilled over his hands. He flipped it into the garage and loped in after it.



# It Could Have Been

*Derek Chinn, fiction*

"E  
xcuse me."

I turned to the owner of the voice. I had been stocking the beer cooler to have them cold by that night. She must have walked in when I was halfway in the cooler, putting the warm bottles in the back. Luckily my behind waving in the air did not scare her off.

"What can I get for you?"

"Margarita, on the rocks. Put it on my tab." She thrust her room key at me.

I wrote down the room number from the key. I grabbed the tequila and triple sec out of the speed rack and began to pour her drink. At least she didn't want the damn thing blended. Working at a summer re-

sort had a lot of benefits, but blender drinks were not among them. Those stupid plastic umbrellas were enough to laugh yourself silly.

I poured the mixture from the shaker into a glass with a salted rim and gave her the drink. She stirred it once and took a large swallow. As she lifted the glass to her lips I noticed the large diamond ring on her hand that told me I might as well get to work. Can't say I was surprised, any woman my age that wasn't here with her husband was probably sporting three children and prospecting for gold. I bent over and started to shove warm bottles of beer to the back of the cooler.

This was my twentieth year working the resort scene. How a summer job as a

kid turned into a career I have no idea. Wasted youth turned to wasted life, following the sun and the parties until I was too old for the parties. Now all that I ever do is sit with a cold beer in my hand and watch the sun melt behind the horizon. It's not like I can go and start an office job after all these years. After about five minutes behind a desk in some closet I would either die or lose my mind, not knowing the difference either way.

I finished with the beer and began to take inventory of the liquor. She was still only halfway through her drink, stirring it absently and staring out at the beach, so I decided to run to the back and get a few things for the night bartender. I returned ten minutes later with three bottles in my hand and she was waiting for me with an empty glass.

"Sorry about the wait. What would you like?"

"Long Island ice tea."

I began snatching the bottles out of the speed rack to make the drink. I loved to make Long Islands. Five bottles that were in the speed rack, work from right to left. Grab a bottle, flip it, pour half an ounce, put it back. I usually didn't go through my routine in the middle of the afternoon, but for some reason that day, I did.

I gave her the drink and wrote it down on her tab. She hardly looked at me, her lips pressed together tightly, a short line below her nose. Good for her, I thought, most tourists about fall out of their stools when you show any flair at all when pouring. "Just like that Tom Cruise movie," was the usual comment.

I learned early that a little pizzazz is a great way for bigger tips. My first resort, when I was nineteen, was pretty uptight. It was an older, family oriented facility that was aimed more towards decorum than flash. I was so bored that summer with work, I can't believe I stuck out the whole season. Denise was the only reason that I stuck it out.

She was eighteen, just out of high school and on her way to college. The first night I met her she was working in the bar, not really knowing what she was doing. I think I remade every drink that night because she kept screwing up the orders. For the next week all that she said to me was "I am so sorry about the other night."

My reminiscing was cut short by the clinking of ice cubes in an empty glass.

## Lamentation

i stepped down into my soul for a moment  
and i saw you  
picking the flowers  
that once colored the garden of my innocence.  
i saw your bleeding fingers  
uprooting  
one flower after another,  
leaving a scarlet trail of blood  
in your destructive wake.  
i saw you stop  
and look up at me with your hostile gray eyes  
and i saw you smile,  
that vicious smile,  
and even your lips were bleeding.  
i saw the hate that burned behind your eyes  
as you began again  
to ravage the garden i had tended so carefully.  
you continued to destroy what was mine,  
mocking the tears that spilled at my feet.  
i watched you,  
my heart issuing a silent plea  
for my garden  
my youth  
but you only looked  
and laughed  
and i knew then that you had won.

*Kelly Mowrer, honorable mention*



"Another Long Island?"

"No, a Bombay martini, shaken, please."

"You bet." When this woman wants to drink she doesn't mess around. I grabbed the Bombay gin from the shelf above the bar and poured it onto the ice already in the shaker. A quick flick of the wrist with the vermouth bottle and then I capped it tightly. I have always modified my shakers to ensure the cap stays on. I shook the martini three times hard and then tossed into the air, flipping it over twice, and "caught" it with the back of my hand, balancing it for about two seconds and then, quickly flipped my hand over. I uncovered the shaker and strained the drink into a martini glass. I grabbed two olives out of the jar and tossed them from behind my back into the glass. This would surely impress her.

She stared at me, unblinkingly. She was tough! Either she has been in enough resorts to have seen everything or she used to work in a bar. From the looks of things, my guess would be the former. I wrote the drink down on her tab and resigned to be my old boring self.

It was creeping up on five o'clock and the night crew would be showing up soon. I made sure everything was stocked, that there was enough ice, napkins, and other little things that would be a nuisance to have to restock in the middle of the busiest hours.

She nursed her drink until I left for the night, sitting at the bar and staring at the beach when I walked out of the door.

I went home, showered, and put on some appropriate clothing, tan shorts and a loose-fitting cotton shirt. I went to a little stand on the beach that served grilled halibut sandwiches for supper. As I was eating and watching the sun slowly descend in the sky, my thoughts turned to Denise and my first summer of work.

We did anything for entertainment. We weren't making good enough money to frequent any of the other touristy spots in the area. I would practice flipping bottles for her, using the empties from the bar and filling them with water. I mastered my basic routine that first summer and it has stayed with me all of this time. We took advantage of the natural resources that were free. The water, the sun, and the stars were all available on a regular basis. She is the reason that I watch the sunset every night.

I thought of how much I really cared about her. I haven't seen anyone seriously since then and doubt I ever will. I am too much of a drifter now to ever be tied down to one place. We made such big plans. I was going to move to where she was attending college and catch on at a bar there at the end of the season. She headed north for school and I never saw her again. I was offered a job in the Bahamas for the winter season and took it, the lifestyle appealed to me. I called and told her that time would not change how I felt, we would be together.

It was an impossible situation. She moved on and so did I. Hearts and thoughts fade away with time. It gradually became longer between phone calls until we just

stopped calling.

The sun eventually set in its usual brilliance and I went home to go to bed, storing my thoughts for the next day's sunset. That was the worst part, walking home, alone, under the stars as couples walked past holding hands. That is the only time being alone bothered me.

The next day at work I went through the room charges, double checking the names and room numbers. I got to the one for the woman I had served the day before and she signed it, "I'm glad to see at least some things didn't change about you. Love, Denise."

## *Lover's Lament*

I reach out to you  
in the middle of the night.  
Yet I feel nothing but the sting  
of cold reality on my arm.  
The warmth of you is not there  
to comfort me.  
Just moonlight reflecting on my pillow.

In my dreams we have sailed  
to foreign places and kissed  
on the shore of the sea.  
We have sat together and watched  
the sunset on a high hill.  
Enjoying every moment in each other's arms.  
But now the sun hides behind  
a mountain of grey clouds.

Time and again we have loved  
in castles of Camelot and in  
forests of green; but only in  
the tapestries of my mind.

In fantasies we have drunk new wine  
and fallen into each other's warm embrace.

Now even with the wine  
there is not you to hold  
and to speak words of love.

*Gina M. Tanksley*



# Memorial Day

*Angie Kenobbie, honorable mention essay*

**I**t was late spring of 1992. I had been home from college for three weeks and was living on a farm that my folks rent. It was that spring I will always remember.

My alarm went off at 5:00 a.m., waking me up for another day of work. I rolled over and shut it off remembering suddenly that it was Memorial Day, and I had the day off. How I forgot such a thing I do not know. Great!! This means I can sleep a little longer, not much longer because the cattle need to be grained.

The next time I looked at the clock it read 8:24 and I decided that I had better get a move on, "the cattle aren't going to feed themselves," as Dad says. Dragging myself out of bed, I looked out my window taking note of how foggy and misty it was outside. What a happy Memorial Day this was going to be. I put on my chore clothes and headed out the door.

In the morning I normally go directly to the barn to fill the buckets with ground corn, but this morning something drew my attention to the east lot, where the first calf heifers that were late in calving stood lined up along the fence looking at me accusingly. Most of them had calved, but there were still a couple left to go. Every night before I go inside I take a look at those that have to calf and determine whether or not to get up in the night/early morning to check them. Last night there were none that appeared close so I didn't check them and that I didn't get up early to check them didn't bother me either. Until I saw her.

She was lying in the middle of the muddy lot with her newborn calf beside her. I knew I had to get them in the barn and out of the rain, so I crawled over the wet fence and started towards her. Something was not right though. The calf had not been attended to. He still had afterbirth on him and was gaunted up, wet and cold. The cow lay there, near her calf, shivering from the cold and the rain that had burdened her for God knows how long. She looked at me as if she were pleading for help, hoping that I could help her. Upon reaching the cow, I noticed that she had prolapsed. Her uterus lay beside her on the cold, muddy, black ground.

I ran to the house to call Dad. My little sister answered the phone telling me that Mom took Dad to the hospital, a horse had thrown him the night before breaking his

collarbone. Panic set in. Who do I call now? DOC!! I looked up Doc's emergency number and could barely dial it because my hand was shaking. Doc answered and I explained the situation. He said he would be there immediately. Meanwhile, I knew what I had to do.

Back outside, I got some straw from the haymow and began rubbing the calf with it, trying to dry him off. I then shook the rest of the straw over the top of him, covering him completely and providing protection from the weather. I had tried to get him on his feet. It had been unsuccessful, he was way too weak to help me and was a big calf. Knowing there was nothing more I could do, I curled up next to the calf, hoping that some of my body heat would warm the little guy. The cow was still lying beside us and I began talking to her, trying to keep her calm so she wouldn't move. If she was to get up she would go into shock, start running around, and tear the uterus from her body, consequently bleed to death.

I heard a vehicle coming down the road. What had been thirty minutes seemed like a day. When I saw Doc's vehicle turn into my lane, I was relieved.

Doc got out of his truck and came over to the fence, rope in hand. I slowly stood up and walked to meet him, telling the story. He said that we had to get a rope around her neck and tie it to the nearest post. Doc and I entered the lot, approaching her. All we had to do was slip the rope around her neck and tie her to a nearby post.

It didn't take her long to recognize that a stranger was in the lot. She was on her feet in no time, blowing snot. No stranger was going to come between her and her calf. With nothing between us and the cow, we began looking for something to climb and before we found it, she was moving towards us at great speed. Doc ran to the feeder bunk, but I knew there was no way that I could reach the bunk in time, so I made a jump over the fence. With no problem, I was over the five foot fence with only touching it once. She calmed down and Doc tried again. We had to get her caught and stop her from running before she tore her uterus. Another failed attempt as she ran wildly around the lot. Doc and I just stood there, watching helplessly as the uterus caught on a mound of dirt and was torn from the cow's body. Doc looked at

me, "There's nothing more we can do. We're gonna have to kill her, she's just gonna bleed to death."

Leaving the lot, I went around to the north side of the barn and opened the gate that adjoined the lots. I managed to coax her in and shut the gate behind her. We then got the calf into the barn, where he would be out of the rain. I decided to try calling home again for Dad. They were home and would be right over.

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Dad stepped out of the pick-up in his duster, boots, and hat. So many times I had seen him save the life of a cow and calf. For a brief moment I hoped he could this time, but my hope faded when he reached back into the truck with his good arm and pulled out the gun. My heart sank as he handed the gun to me. There was no hero this time.

We were going to take her in to the locker, but because she was weak, delirious and had lost too much blood we weren't going to try to get her into the trailer. We had to kill her there, and then take her in. Mom went and got the tractor and loader to use as a hoist after the heifer was shot, to drain the blood. I stood there by Dad as he spoke to Doc. I began to hope that this was just a bad dream. My alarm had to go off soon.

I wandered a few steps to the barn where the calf was. Stepping inside, I saw him lying in a pile of straw, numb to what was happening around him. Poor little guy, if I would have gotten up when my alarm went off I could have prevented this. It was obvious that the calf was far too big for the heifer to have on her own. God only knows how long she was in labor in the wet, muddy lot while I was in my cozy, dry bed. Dad hollering my name brought me back to reality. It was time.

He handed me the gun and told me to walk over to the fence, when the cow came close enough I was to pull the trigger. Doc got her attention and she came darting over to the fence, not staying long enough. Taking off, she began to stumble and collapsed, laying on the ground for awhile, breathing heavily as the blood dripped from her. Up again and back to the fence she came, this time she stood there, looking at me. I saw the same glint in her eye, that same pleading that I had seen earlier. I was the



one she had trusted, had hope in, and now  
....

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After it was over, we loaded her in the back of the pick-up and Mom and Dad took her in to the locker. I went to the barn with Doc to treat the calf. We tried to tube feed him by sticking a long tube down his esophagus and forcing milk into his stomach. There was still no response from him.

He just laid there, blinking his eyes and shivering, like his mother earlier this morning.

I spent the afternoon with the calf, going in the house once to get my hair dryer and an old blanket. I brought it out to the barn and tried to give to him the love he was missing from his mother.

Evening came and I went in the house totally exhausted. I've seen many animals die, sold many of my pets to market, but none affected me as much as this did.

The next morning my alarm went off at 4:30, extra early so I could spend some time with the calf (which I had named Kid). I went out to the barn . . . only to find another lifeless form. Kid didn't make it through the night. I shut the door behind me and walked to the north lot where there was still a red stain in the ground and where the cows stood along the fence looking at me, waiting to be fed.

## Who Watched Her Brother Die

*Donna Milkie, fiction*

The littlest one had a nightmare again. Not one of the non-specific monsters-and-goblins-and-interminable-chase-scene-variety. This one was different: it was real; it was final. She watched her brother's car roll over onto itself. A slow-motion shock settled over her.

She awoke weeping, kicking off the blankets that had paralyzed her legs in sleep. Now she ran, ran to her mother's bed, still shaking with grief. In a voice of

whispered sobs, she gave the dream to her mother.

Her mother took the child in her arms, murmuring quiet words and soothing sounds. The child still wept, yet tried to keep quiet enough to catch her mother's comfort-voice.

*Just thank Jesus that it isn't so. It was only a dream. Just thank Him that it didn't really happen.*

The child was disappointed by her

mother's words, and betrayed. She felt older and wiser and sadder for knowing. Her mother would never see.

It did happen, it wasn't just a dream, her brother was dead and only the child had the sense to mourn. And later in the day, when she saw her brother—unbroken, unscathed—the child would remember his death, and mourn it, and love him more severely because of it.

### Before Night

Shadows dancing  
Feet stilled by the hush  
Wind speaking to water  
And trees  
Respond  
Eyes straining for black beyond  
For shape and movement  
Ears listen  
To the wild whisper  
Whisper dancing through air  
Moving voices flow outward  
Source concealed in smoke  
Swirling  
Without instruction  
There is only Knowing  
Voice  
Listening  
Dance.

*Kelly Mowrer*



# Fences

Heidi Hensley, essay

Coming out the back garage door onto the patio, rags and brush in my left hand, the paint pail swinging from my right hand, I squinted at the sharp contrast the afternoon summer sun made after the dark interior of the garage. I momentarily unloaded my burden onto the weathered bench on the north side of the patio, and shoved my paint-splattered hat on my head, pulling my long ponytail through the hole in the back.

"Looks like this bench should be done, too, Grandpa," I called to my companion, who was already kneeling beside the fence, brush poised above the pointed board.

Looking up, he called back, "Yeah, maybe tomorrow, after we git this fence done." He let his eyes travel the perimeter of the backyard, following the picket fence until it ended and the lattice began. "Guess we'll have to do that, too," he said, warily eyeing the intricate design of the privacy fence in the southwest corner of the yard. Balancing his paint brush on the open can of "fawn" stain, he sat back on his haunches and pushed back the old blue and yellow NC+ seed cap, exposing a bare head covered only by a ring of gray hair. I noted that his skin got noticeable paler above the place where he normally wore the cap. Although he was wearing one of his thin plaid short-sleeved shirts, I knew there were deep tan lines halfway between his elbow and shoulder, and at his neck in a definite V-shape—permanently engraved in his skin after fifty years of farming. He picked up the brush with a leathery veined hand and dipped the long bristles into the pail.

I hurriedly gathered up my supplies once again and crossed the soft grass to join him. As I knelt beside him, I wondered how we would fill the hours ahead of us—what would we talk about? In all my seventeen years I had never spent such a significant period of time alone with Grandpa, and although I loved him dearly, the one-on-one prospect kind of made me nervous.

It was late August, and Grandpa was visiting with us until school started. But today Mom was gone at teachers' meetings all day, and Wendy was baby-sitting until five. Dad would be home for lunch, but for the most part it would be just Grandpa and me.

"You girls did a nice job on the house," Grandpa broke through my reverie. "That was a mighty big job you took on. It's good you saw it through." Inside I was glowing. Compliments from Grandpa were never empty or frivolous. I felt as though I had really accomplished something when Grandpa saw fit to mention it.

But I said only, "Yeah, it was hard work. But it wasn't so bad once we got the high parts painted." We chatted about the house and the work that lay ahead of us, then fell into a contented silence as we continued to paint. A certain rhythm began to form; stroke up and down, up and down—dip into the pail to re-wet the brush. Then repeat, taking care to cover the entire area, letting the parched wood soak up the stain. The sharp smell of the liquid was almost intoxicating and the work began to give me a hypnotic feeling—up and down, up and down, dip. Now and then I'd pause to swat at a buzzing fly, lazily floating along on the currents of the pleasant breeze.

"Your Grandma shore would've liked to make this trip," Grandpa startled me out of my hypnosis. Although Grandpa had often made reference to Grandma since her death the winter before, I'd never talked to him personally about it. "She was real fond of the flowers around here. Thought they were real purdy." He paused for a moment, and cleared his throat before continuing. "It's been more'n six months already. Hard to believe." I said nothing, afraid to spoil this moment. Somehow I had a feeling this was a one-time glimpse into his heart.

"Guess it was about this time last year when they found the cancer," he continued, still intent on painting the board in front of him. "We was just out here that May." He let out an audible sigh. "Boy, those things shore can go fast." He stopped talking then and painted for awhile longer. Then he coughed—a loud cough that had always startled me as a child. Now I didn't flinch, hoping he'd go on. He did. "It's different when ya lose your wife. Not the same thing as losing a child. Ya don't sleep and eat with a child every day like ya do with your wife." He paused again, and I

noticed the corner of his eye was moist. "No siree. People jest don't know what it's like till they've been there." He lapsed into silence for awhile, but it was a comfortable silence—the kind you share with someone you're close to.

We painted as far as the back gate, finishing the fence line that bordered between our yard and the Daczickys', our Czechoslovakian neighbors. Grandpa had struck up a conversation with Mr. Daczicky the night before about WW II. He was always friendly with strangers and loved nothing better than to talk to people. I remember him teasing the waitresses at Country Kitchen, where we frequently dined, complimenting them on the food and their quick service. Two things Grandpa always appreciated were good food and hard workers.

He noticed the work I did around the house to fill the gap that was left with a working mother. Tasks that I took for granted, like doing the laundry, cooking supper, or mowing the lawn, Grandpa noticed and commended me for a job well done. "You're gonna miss that girl when she goes off to college, Nancy," he'd tell my mom. I'd flush with embarrassment—and pride—at his words. Then I'd dig in even harder, not to earn more compliments, but to maintain the "hard worker" image he had of me.

It's been four years since Grandpa and I painted that fence. But to this day it remains a special memory for both of us. Nearly every time we visit, he'll end a story with, "Like the time Heidi and I painted that whole long fence in Lynden. Now *that* was a job," he'll say with a wink at me. And I wink back, thinking we not only painted a fence that day; we tore one down.